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Chapter 1: First Dates

First Dates.

I rubbed my hands over my jeans for the tenth time in less than ten seconds. Yes, I was counting. That's how nervous I was over a girl. Me? I chuckled inwardly making it sound like I was clearing my throat before glancing at my watch. 15:45. She's 15 minutes late and I'm still here.

"Uh – hey." An angelic voice behind me said. Okay yes I know angelic sounds rather cheesy but that's how whipped I was. I got up and faced her. She looked beautiful with her white dress.

"Hi." I replied with a smile then pulled the chair out for her. Blushing, she sat down and muttered a nervous "Thank you." I made my way around to the other side of the table and sat down while clearing my throat.

"So how are you?" I asked making sure my voice sounded even. No way on earth did I want her to notice how nervous I was.

"Uh – I'm fine. All chilled thanks. And you?"

"Oh I'm over the moon now that you're here." I said with a smug smile. Avoiding eye contact she giggled and fixed her hair.

“Uh – thank you?”

“You’re welcome.” I replied. “Ready to order?” she nodded and I waved my hand for the waitress to bring the menus. What drew me to this girl in the first place was her innocence. She was naïve and extremely hard to get. Being the guy that I am, I’m always up for a challenge. Even if it takes me a month. At the beginning of our meal she looked tense but as time went by she relaxed and even began complimenting me and starting conversation. Jackpot.

“So – X.” she said with a smile. “The player, bad boy that every girl wants to be with. Why me?” Ah, crap. I hate this question. Knowing exactly what she meant I continued to ask

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“Why you, what?”

“You aren’t stupid, X you know exactly what I mean.”

“Well,” I sang trying to buy myself time. “You’re very beautiful, first of all. Smart. You aren’t easy to get like the rest of these girls and I just happened to be drawn to you.” She smiled and said thank you.

“I had a great time with you today.” I said as we walked to my car. Technically it was my father's car but nobody has to know.

“Me too, didn’t think I would but hey, you surprise me Luxolo Xulu.”

“Ouch! Way to bruise a guy’s ego!” I cried out. She laughed and looked at me.

“Yeah. I really did though. Thank you.” She said.

“Yeah?” she nodded sheepishly and I took a hold of her hand before gently pulling her to stand in front of me. “We should do it again sometime.”

“Uh – yes – uhm that - ” she sighed. “That would be nice.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.” She said. I could feel her breathing escalating and her hands sweating in my grip. I reeled her closer to me and wrapped my arm around her waist. She let out a slight sigh and closed her eyes.

Chapter 2: Crushes

Crushes.

Apparently a "crush" is called one because that person might not feel the same way you do and then you end up getting crushed emotionally. It's either I don't have the same emotions as everyone else or I simply don't care because the girl I was with yesterday - her name is Pamela. Pam for short - it literally took me a month to ask her out then another one for her to actually say yes. I wasn't "crushed" when she turned me down several times I just kept trying until she said yes. Oh and if you're wondering whether we kissed yesterday or not? We didn't. She hit me with that 'I don't kiss on a first date.' line.

"Hurry up and eat you'll be late for school." my mom said while nudging me bringing me back to earth.

"Oh yeah. Sure." I replied while stuffing my mouth with my mother's delicious cooking. She sat opposite me and smiled with a cup of steaming coffee in her hands.

"What?" I asked while gulping down my juice.

"You seem happy. What happened on your date yesterday?" I chuckled.

"Some things a man just doesn't share with his mother." I said as a joke.

"Hey! You tell me everything. The fact that you think you're grown up Luxolo."

"I am, mama."

"Not as long as you're under my roof you aren't. Besides you're only in grade 11."

"And I've never failed! It's a sign." Raising her eyebrow she asked "A sign? Of what exactly?"

"That I'm a man!" I stated as though it was the most obvious thing in the world.

My father walked in the kitchen and gave my mom a peck on the lips disturbing whatever she was gonna say next.

"Get a room, adults." I said sliding off the chair and taking one last bite of my toast. "I'm bouncing." holding up two fingers in the air I made my way to the door when my dad stopped me.

"Wait - I'll take you to school." he said leaving me and my mom amused.

Thing is my dad is forever busy and can't take me to school in the mornings which is why he taught me how to drive in the first place. My mom was always reluctant about me driving since I don't even have a learners but I'm good at everything I do so no worries. My mom can't take me to school either because she has driving phobia. I don't know why and she changes the topic anytime I bring it up. Which leads me to my next point - she has her own personal driver that takes her anywhere she wants and he sometimes drives me when my mother's motherly instincts are insane.

"Uh - why do you want to take me to school." I asked trying to figure it out.

"Father and son time. I've been neglecting you guys lately." he replied honestly. He kissed my mom again and I walked out.

Again, get a room.

Turns out dad really did want to take me to school and had no agenda. We talked about guy stuff and I realised just how distant we had become.

“Hey X what’s up?” my female friend said as she pulled me in for a hug and quickly let go before excitedly clapping her hands. “Your date! What happened?”

“Let’s walk and talk.” I said with a chuckle and an eye roll. “Well there really isn’t much to tell. She arrived 15 minutes late and-” her eyes popped out and she hit my shoulder.

“Freaking 15 minutes! And you stayed?”

“Yep, I was thinking the exact same thing.” She chuckled.

“You must really like her. You’re literally the most impatient guy I know. Pamela. Respect you girl.” She said with humour in her tone.

“So we talked and gelled and didn’t kiss because she hit me with that ‘I don’t kiss on a first date’ line. We were so freaking close to doing it!” She stopped in front of me and stared into my eyes with a blank expression. This always makes me nervous as she does it every time. It doesn’t matter what the situation is – mad, excited, happy, depressed, about to cry – anything. I never like the reaction.

And I didn’t. She imploded into fits of laughter and I gave her my own look which I know she hates. The serious ‘don’t you ever do that again,’ look. After impatiently waiting for the forever laughing Amanda she finally stopped and my guy

friends were here already laughing with her not even knowing what the hell she was laughing at.

“You are all so retarded.” I stated.

“Wait – please tell them what happened.” She said while clutching her tummy from all the laughing. Seeing that I was being defeated I spat out what she was laughing at and the guys all stopped laughing as much as they were and patted me on the back with contained laughter.

“We feel your pain.” Blessing (his actual name is Sibusiso but we call him Blessing) said with his hand over the left part of his chest.

“I don’t!” Amanda screamed reminding all of us that she was the only girl in the crew.

The bell for line ups rang killing our vibes in the process and we all scuttled off into our different lines. The day dragged along and when that final bell rang I sprang out of my chair and shot across the room. I simply couldn’t wait to see Pam even though I last saw her yesterday. Her aura sort of had a calmness to it and I loved being around her. I dodged all my friends knowing damn well that they would bombard me with questions. After

making the perfect escape I bought her Ferrero Rocher chocolates and called her.

“Hello?” she said after the second ring.

“Why do I get the feeling that you were actually waiting on my call.”

“So what if I was?”

“I’d be flattered.”

We talked a bit before confirming when and where we’d be meeting. I was surprised to learn that I was still nervous and I had this extremely weird feeling in my tummy when I saw her approaching. I cleared my throat and took a deep breath to calm myself down and keep my cool.

“Hey, you.” I said with open arms and enfolded her into a hug like it was the last time I would ever see her. I sniffed in her fragrance and let her go. “You look beautiful today.” She blushed.

“Thank you.”

The rest of the time we spent together was at the park by the swings talking about anything and everything under the sun. Time does indeed fly when you’re having fun because when she checked the time she literally jumped off the swing almost toppling over and hurting herself.

“Pam what the hell! What’s wrong you almost hurt yourself!” I shouted.

“I’m – I’m sorry it’s just that my parents are going to kill me X I need to get home!” she stuttered. I checked the time on my phone and it was past 6.

“I’m so sorry for keeping you - ” she cut me short.

“It’s okay. Can you take me home?” hope was written all over her face and I swore under my breath.

“I didn’t come with the car.”

I lay awake for half the night wondering whether she was okay or not. Guilt was enfolding me like a wet blanket and I was about to call her but that didn’t seem to be the most ideal thing to do at 23:15 at night so I settled for texting her.

‘Are you okay?’ I wrote but I erased it and tried again.

‘I hope I didn't get you into too much trouble...’ I erased it again and ran my hand over my face. Okay – it’s just a text.

'I'm sorry for keeping you for so long. I hope you're okay.' I hit send before thinking about it and pulled my teddy bear closer before attempting to sleep. I got a reply almost immediately which caught me by surprise.

'I'm okay thank you. I made up a lie about being at the library with friends ac luckily they bought it.'

I let out a sigh of relief which I didn't even know I was holding in.

'You have no idea how relieved you just made me. Now go to sleep. We don't want you slacking in class.' the response was immediate once more and I slept peacefully knowing Pam was okay.

"Wake up Luxolo you're going to be late." My mom said while shaking me.

"Just five more minutes, please." I mumbled before facing the other side. She did the one thing that would actually give me nightmares – literally. She took my teddy bear causing me to sit up straight and yawn while giving her a death stare.

“I love you too, sweetheart.” She kissed my forehead. “Now get up. And I don’t know how many times I’ve told you to stop sleeping without a shirt.”

“It’s tradition.” I mumbled while sliding off the bed and slipping on my slippers. She rolled her eyes at me and smiled before walking out. I didn’t even notice she was dressed for work until I heard the clicking sound of her high heels on my wooden floor.

I usually sleep very early. By early I mean 21:30 after Muvhango early

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so last night strained me and it shows. I took a really quick shower and grabbed my bag before joining the parents downstairs for breakfast.

“Morning, son.” Dad said as I sat down.

“Hi.” I replied while adding milk to my cereal.

“Well someone is in a grim mood.” I added two spoons of sugar earning a stare from my mother.

“I’m just tired, dad.” I said with a mouth full of Corn Flakes.

“Want to talk about it?”

“There’s nothing to talk about, dad. I really am just tired. And could I please eat in peace. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day after all.” Mom smiled and dad simply sighed. This guy worries a bit too much. I finished up my breakfast and ran upstairs remembering my phone. When I got down mom was gone and dad was impatiently looking at his watch.

“You taking me to school again?” I asked really confused.

“Yes. Now come before we’re both late.”

The trip to school was better than yesterday as we were getting used to this driving together to school thing. I avoided all questions about my girlfriend – but wait, is she my girlfriend? This might sound funny but I’ve never actually dated a girl before so all this was rather new. Anyway I avoided talking about her at all costs. I just wasn’t ready because I’m guessing he would want to meet her and we aren’t at that point in our – relationship?

I’ve always had that ‘What do you do with a girlfriend? Do I have to bathe her? Do I have to feed her? Do I have to take her for walks? What happens when we run out of things to talk about? It all sounds a bit too stressful I think I’ll stay single for the rest of my life.’ mentality.

But my fantasy was short lived when I met Pam. She changed my whole freaking mind set on girls and I’m 17 years old. This

girl got me singing 'Where have you been all my li-i-i-i-fe' by Rihanna. I've caught feelings real bad and real quick.

I've said this before and I'll say it again, what drew me to her was her innocence and how naïve she is. For the month that I was pursuing her I learned that she isn't easily influenced by anything and that's the kind of person I need in my life right now since I'm surrounded by people who want to get drunk and blackout for the fun of it. Apparently I'm a weird guy since all I want to do is go on a road trip or go camping. I want to do something I've never done before and live, not just exist. I can totally see myself doing all that with Pam. When we're done with varsity I want us to do all the things we've always wanted to do – together. A bucket list type of thing.

I was literally dragging myself around school the whole time. I could hardly keep my eyes open in class and I got kicked out of two. What's worse? They were both my favourite teachers. I thought you were different ma'am... so disappointed. I guess it was my own fault for taking so long to text because what are the possibilities of her falling asleep then waking up at 23:15 to reply to my text cause she dreamt it...? Close to zero. Well that was smart of you, Luxolo. Smart move. I groaned when I thought of all the sleep I missed and the bell saved from being thrown out of class once more.

“You look exhausted.” Amanda pointed out at break while handing me a chicken burger and coke from the tuck shop. I took the coke and gulped it down just to freshen myself up a little bit.

“You’re way weird.” She said before plopping herself next to me.

“Thanks for these.” I said while holding them up. “Where are the guys?”

“Playing soccer as usual.” She replied while sinking her teeth into a burger of her own. I closed my eyes tight and shook my head at that stupid question.

“Of course. What is up with me today?” I said in an irritated manner.

“Please do share!” she shouted while slapping me on the arm.

“I’m tired bruh! I slept late.”

“Why?” she asked before taking another bite of her burger and looking at me with curious eyes. I told her all about how stupid

I was and waited for her to laugh but she didn't, which was a relief and got me worried all at the same time.

"You really care about her, don't you?" I smiled with half my lip.

"You have no idea."

"Ask to meet her today." Confused, I asked, "Why?"

"Just do it, Luxolo." She said sternly. Full name – that's how you know it's real.

Chapter 3: Guilt

Guilt.

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Chapter 3: Scars and Kisses

Scars and Kisses.

My house is a walking distance away – well if you don't mind walking for half an hour – so after school I popped in my earphones and began my long walk to home. At this time the house was definitely empty 'cause the parents were both at work. I couldn't help but think of what Amanda said so I took my phone out of my pocket and called Pam.

“Hello?” she answered. She's one of those people that say 'hello' as though they're asking a question.

“Hey - ” I had a mental battle of whether I should say “Hey babe.” or just “Hey.” I settled for the latter. “Can I see you today?” I asked to avoid awkwardness.

“No!” she said quickly.

“No?”

“No.” I chewed the inside of my lip trying to figure out why she would say no.

“Why?”

“I just – I have a lot of homework and I need – I just -” I could tell that she was lying and panic shot right through me.

“Pam – why are you lying?” she was silent for a while. “Pam?” my voice was levelled the whole time.

“I can’t meet you today X. Please just leave it at that.”

“No!” I shouted and I heard her gasp a little on the other side of the line.

“No?” she asked.

“No.” I retorted stubbornly.

“Fine. Same place as yesterday in 30 minutes.” And she hung up. I picked up my pace and quickly changed when I got home. I was out in less than 10 minutes. Mom and dad will kill me for this but I took my mom’s old car and drove to the park. I sat at the swings we were chilling at yesterday and waited.

I heard a familiar voice clearing her throat and I got up immediately and faced her.

“Hey!” I said with relief seeping through my body and mind. I pulled her in for a hug and she flinched when I touched the small of her back. I quickly let go and looked at her. Tears were at the brim of her eyes and she wriggled her hand out of mine.

“Stop staring at me.” She said while sitting down on the swing and closing her eyes while gritting her teeth. I was still trying to process the whole thing.

“What happened?” I asked. I was about to reach out and touch her but I thought twice and changed my mind. Settled for sitting down next to her.

“What do you think?”

“Was it because of me?” I asked when the same feeling I had in my chest last night came back again.

“What do you think?” she said more sternly this time.

“But – last night you said you were fine Pamela!” my shouting clearly pissed her off because her nose flared and she looked at me.

“What! What did you expect from me, Luxolo? For me to tell you that I got home and my dad beat the hell out of me because I got home late? He's not stupid X he didn't buy the library thing.” tears were rolling down her eyes now and I hoped it was because of the pain and not because of me. Which was stupid in itself because the pain is because of me.

I swallowed the lump that developed in my throat and didn't say anything for a few moments. Is this how it feels to see someone you deeply care about in pain? In my case, both physically and emotionally. Someone might as well take daggers and shoot me right in the heart.

"Why did you lie to me?"

"Because I was embarrassed."

"Am I the one who turned you into a liar?" pity this wasn't a text I could just erase or retract because I immediately regretted saying it.

"I don't know how to answer that question."

"Me too. I'm sorry I asked." there was silence for a while when I broke it. "Can I see your scars?"

She looked at me in the most disturbing way.

"Why would you want to see my scars? Besides they're on my back and thighs so you can't." she held on to the sides of the swing and went back and forth slightly.

"So I can kiss them." she stopped what she was doing and shot me a look. I quickly justified myself while keeping my calm.

"Not in an erotic way. Just a 'I'm sorry you had to go through this because of me, way.' I feel horrible." I was looking into her

eyes the whole time refusing to be thrown off and she was the one who looked away first.

"Wow-" she said before clearing her throat. I waited for her to say something more but she didn't.

"Don't just leave me hanging." I said.

"You're actually serious?"

"Yes." I replied simply. She looked away for a bit then faced me again.

"No funny business."

"I promise." I said with a smile of relief.

kiss /kɪs/

verb

touch or caress with the lips as a sign of love, sexual desire, or greeting.

noun

1. a touch or caress with the lips.
2. a slight touch of a ball against another ball.
3. a small cake, biscuit, or sweet.

I have my own definition to the word kiss.

"We both know this is going to be a bit awkward, right?" I pointed out.

"Well, yeah. But you promised no funny business and I believe you." she sat on the couch while saying this and her eyes were wandering around the whole time.

"My parents aren't here so don't worry." she relaxed a bit and smiled. "Uh - please take off your shirt and lay on your tummy. I'll be right back."

She took a deep breath and nodded. I moved along to the main bathroom and took my mother's "Zonke Healing. Cura Skin Gel" when I got back she was laying on her arms and her shirt was underneath her.

Seeing the marks on her back made me want to turn her around and tell her that I'm sorry. To kiss them and make them disappear. To - to heal them. I pulled myself together and touched her back gently.

"Are my hands cold?" she shook her head without looking back. I opened the lid and spread it over my hands before laying them on her back. She flinched at my touch and her breathing sped up a bit. I spread out and gently massaged the skin gel over her scars trying not to think about it.

"This feels nice." she said.

"Does it hurt?" I asked legitimately concerned.

"Not anymore." I smiled and finished up.

"You can put your shirt back on now." I said while getting up from the couch and returning the product to where it was. When I got back she looked calm and not so tense.

"I thought you were going to kiss me." she said with confusion in her voice.

"Oh but I did. Just because I didn't use my lips doesn't mean that I didn't. I used my hands to kiss you and it worked." she dropped her head and when she looked up again tears were swimming around in her eyes. I panicked. Did she not like that? What have I done, now? Flip! I shouldn't have forced her to meet up with me! I knelt in front of her and held both her hands in mine.

"Hey what's wrong?" I asked while searching her eyes.

"Nothing - " she tilted her head up to stop the tears from rolling down and faced me again. "No one has ever done something like this for me before. Thank you." she threw her arms around me and engulfed me a breathtaking hug - literally.

I think you make me happy.

"You are such a butt kisser!" Blessing shouted after I told him what I did for Pam yesterday. "It's a pity you didn't actually kiss it."

"Not all guys are like you!" I said with a chuckle and threw him with the basketball. Blessing was the captain and I was just under him so we had to get there early and practice before everyone got there.

"No, boy everyone can see that you're whipped. Big fucking time!"

"Mxm. How many times have I told you to stop swearing, Sibusiso?" he aimed for the goal and it went in."

"Oh shit. Sorry."

Happens every time.

After the practice I could barely stand up straight because of how unfit I was and Blessing noticed and laughed.

"Want a ride?" he said while picking up both our bags and walking to his car. Unlike me he has his own car.

"I'd like a ride

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sure." I said while trailing behind him. We entered the car and I gulped down all the water in my bottle.

"Holidays got you good?"

"You have no idea. My mother's cooking is the best and she cooked all the time so I had no choice, really."

"Your mom." he said with a glint of naughtiness in his eye.

"What about her?"

"Flames..."

"I will punch you in the throat!" I shouted and he simply laughed it off.

We talked about anything and everything under the sun and he kept cracking his dirty jokes which made me punch him every time. Sometimes I don't understand why Blessing and I are friends. We are two extremely different people but somehow it works. Blessing is a Cocky, hot headed guy that reminds us every time just how rich he is. He's the richest guy in our crew and the type of guy you don't introduce to your girlfriend.

He once took one of the guys' girl and we separated for a while but the brother ship is just too tight. Another thing - never has he been in a relationship for more than a month. Never. So I

didn't plan on introducing him to Pam anytime soon. We finally arrived at my house and he went in before me then charged to the fridge while I went up to my room, unlocked and placed my bags on the couch next to the door. I heard his footsteps coming up and I quickly walked out and locked my room before he got to me.

"Why do you always do that?" he asked.

"Do what?" I played dumb and pushed him out of the way.

"Damn, I stink. I need to take a shower."

"I'm glad I didn't have to tell you that, myself. Anyway – your room, you've locked it ever since I met you. What don't you want me to see?"

"Just leave it alone, Blessing. Let me walk you out." He threw his hands in the air as a sign of defeat and left.

As I was sitting there and channel hopping I didn't know whether to call Pam and ask to meet her or just chill and lay off of her for a while. But at the same time I was still worried about

the bruises that she got because of me. In my imagination I could still feel her bruises under my hands and my whole body shivered. I grabbed my phone with shaking hands and dialed her digits without even thinking about it.

“Babe!” she exclaimed excitedly catching me off guard and I smiled along with a sigh of relief.

“How are you feeling, babe? Are your bruises any better?”

“You have got magic hands! I feel so much better and I’ve got nobody else to thank but you. Thank you so much.” That simple statement made me grin stupidly and I forgot I had to reply.

“Uh – wow. You sound really happy.” She laughed heartily.

“Well I can’t not be. I have the best boyfriend in the world!”

Okay I’m glad I make her this happy but for me it was rather odd how jubilant she was all of a sudden because the last time I saw her we were still awkward around each other. Well she was practically half naked in front of me so maybe that just broke down all barriers between us. I’m not complaining though. Her happiness is mine.

“Can I see you today?” I asked confidently.

“Sure. Same place?”

“Definitely. See you in 30 minutes.”

“As normal.” She added on and I smiled before hanging up and I took a quick shower then left.

The day I saw Pam’s scars I had made a mental note to not leave without the car when going to meet up with her and I was planning on keeping it up as long as we were together – which is hopefully forever. I parked the car and got out making my way to the swings and waited for her as usual. She arrived dressed in jeans and a long sleeved shirt.

“Hello gorgeous.” I said with a stupid grin plastered on my face and got up to hug her. “How are you?” I asked referring to the scars.

“Well I’m better now. I wouldn’t mind being ‘kissed’ by you again.”

“I wouldn’t mind ‘kissing’ you again but for now I’d like to spend time with you like normal couples do.” She giggled.

“And what exactly do normal couples do?” she said with half a smile.

“They talk.” I said with a chuckle. “Without one of them getting half naked.” I added. She giggled and hid her face in my shoulder.

“You’re embarrassing me...” she sulked and looked up at me.

“I apologise.” I said then kissed her forehead. “Let’s take a walk.”

Pam and I talked about her as I kept on asking her questions about herself and the more I knew about her the deeper I fell for her that I even ended up holding her hand.

“You know,” she began as she looked at me, “I’m the girl who’s always there for people when they need a friend. I’m also the girl who faces many issues alone, but will still do anything to see someone else smile.” I kept quiet and waited for her to continue.

“People often take advantage of my kindness and it’s been happening for so long that I build protective layers around myself. Walls that are impossible for anyone else to get through but then you came along and did exactly that. You came and tore down the walls with your kindness and your caring spirit I feel that you’ve healed me. I know this may sound stupid since we haven’t been together for long but you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

You people do know that this was my first girlfriend right? So naturally, I had no idea how to respond to that.

“I’ll never hurt you.” I blurted. And I meant it. She smiled as I pulled her closer and kissed her forehead while holding her head on both sides.

“Neither will I. I promise.” She said and hugged me.

After that heart to ear [I say heart to ear because she was pouring out her heart and I was simply listening] we played to the car with me chasing and picking her up until we got to our destination and drove off.

Chapter 4: Tickets

Tickets.

Pam and I had been dating for almost a month now and neither of us was ready to introduce each other to the parents. Blessing still thought I was whipped since I talked about her all the time and I was still grateful to Amanda for practically forcing me to see Pam. Female intuition must be insane. The month was February and everyone was hyped about the Valentines social just like every other year. We were forced to go to these school socials since grade 8 and now that we could choose whether we wanted to go or not we found it weird and pointless to not go since we had one more year left of school and could actually get dates unlike previous years when you shook out of your mind just thinking about asking the girl you like to go to the V-ball with you. Treasured memories those are.

I had offered to sell tickets this year but was disappointed when only a few people came to buy from me but preferred Amanda or the other girls. I ended up asking her whether my armpits stink or if I didn't comb my hair properly the entire week. I

couldn't figure out why people, apart from the ones who actually knew me, didn't buy from me.

"You intimidate people." Amanda said as she threw her bag over her shoulder and walked with me hurrying behind her.

"Excuse me?" I asked. "I intimidate people? That's insane. And will you slow down!" I shouted as I held her shoulder and made her face me.

She rolled her eyes and stopped.

"For a straight A student you are pretty dumb. The people in lower grades are intimidated by you because of the way you carry yourself. They don't know you, dude, since you keep to yourself so much so they don't know what to expect when they actually approach you." She pointed out as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"But – it's just tickets."

"Doesn't matter, they still don't know you. And I don't know how you're PFP [Pushing for Prefect] when half the school doesn't even know how to approach you." She turned around and continued walking leaving me hanging.

"Amanda please wait." I said while trying to catch up with her but she just said, "I'm in a hurry, dude. We'll talk tomorrow."

It's either I'm going crazy or Amanda has been giving me cold vibes lately. At first I thought it was my imagination but as time went by it got worse and I think it will get even worse if I don't talk to her about it. Today was one of the days when I decided to walk home and think about what she was saying. "Me? Intimidating?" I huffed and continued walking.

"Talk to me." I said as way of greeting.

"You are lucky it's me calling you and not your mother. Who taught you to answer your phone like that?" I chuckled lightly.

"I'm self-taught skhokho. Nobody can tell me nothing." He chuckled on the other side.

"Nyani ntwana? Well watch me tell you what to do."

Ever since my father began driving me to school our relationship has become tighter than it ever was and I couldn't be more grateful for that. He had called to ask me to buy mom flowers on his behalf since he wouldn't be able to buy them when he got back from work. He even gave me permission to drive the car as long as I didn't tell my mother about it. If only he knew I had been driving it without anyone's permission. I hurried up my pace and got there in 25 minutes other than 30 and drove to town while in school uniform. As I got out the car to get into the mall I noticed a girl looking at me. She looked young, around 14 or 15 and she looked familiar so I smiled at

her and she looked behind her to check whether I was smiling at her or not so I nodded and pointed at her so confirm that I indeed was smiling at her and she innocently smiled back and waved before I disappeared into the mall.

I was given specific orders to buy orchids and I did just that [mind you, this man didn't give me money so I was using my money and damn, orchids aren't cheap.]. I drove back home while listening to music and went to hide them in my room so he would give them to her himself.

.

After doing my homework I went downstairs to watch Trace but I wasn't concentrating as I kept thinking about Amanda and her attitude towards me lately so I decided to call her.

"What do you want?" she snarled.

"You know, when someone has done something to you that you don't like then it's best to talk to them about it instead of treating them like trash. I'm just saying." I said calmly. She was quiet for a while so I decided to speak again.

"Okay, Amanda. I'm not going to apologise because I know for a fact that I did you no wrong so what is your problem with me?" she sighed.

"You've changed." She said simply.

“I’m flattered by the fact that you think I’m a mind reader but in reality I’m not so please do specify.” I could literally sense her rolling her eyes on the other side of the line.

“Ever since you began dating Pam she’s all you ever talk about. We don’t have our deep conversations anymore because she always finds her way into it. I’m just sick of always hearing about her and I miss talking to you about anything else other than her.” She said honestly. I was thrown aback by her honesty because I had no idea she felt that way.

“I’m not going to apologise for being proud of my girlfriend.” I retorted.

“You don’t get it, do you?” she chuckled humourlessly. “It isn’t about that. It’s about the fact that she’s all we ever hear about. We get the fact that you think about her Monday to Monday but you don’t need to remind us every time we get together. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but the guys play soccer more often now. Because of you!”

Now that was true and I wouldn’t have noticed it unless she told me this.

“So if you had a problem with that why didn’t you just tell me?” I asked in hope of getting an honest and straight forward answer.

“Because I enjoy being mad at you. It worked, didn’t it?” she replied with a hint of humour in her voice.

“Wow.” I said with a levelled tone. “All you’ve said makes sense. Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” She replied proudly and I hung up.

.

As soon as I realised I hadn’t had anything to eat all day my tummy rumbled and I stumbled to the kitchen to search for something to eat but there was nothing. I checked the time. ‘Mom should be home by now.’ I thought and decided to wait because I knew that if I tried cooking it would be a suicide mission in progress.

I laid facing the ceiling with soft music playing on my PC and just thought. I thought about Pam

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Amanda and most importantly how the lower grades were intimidated by me. The thought still sounded ridiculous but it made sense since the people I chill with aren’t exactly the nicest people on earth so I was prejudiced to be like them and I didn’t know how to change people’s minds. There was a knock on my door and I jumped up in the hope that I would find my mom but mood deflated as soon as I saw my dad in his crisp suit and briefcase.

“Oh, it’s you.” I said not being able to hide the disappointment from my voice.

“Where’s your mother?” he asked sounding worried.

“I thought that you were her...” the look on his face after I said that made me worry along with him and he turned around and charged downstairs with me charging behind him. I didn’t bother closing my door since my parents were the only two people allowed in my room.

“Did she come home and then leave?” he asked still walking down the stairs and not looking at me.

“No. I came home earlier than normal then went to buy the flowers but she wasn’t here at all.”

He lifted his hand and ordered me to go fetch the flowers so I quickly turned around and brought them to him as he was making a call.

“Voicemail.” He said in frustration and placed the phone next to him. I placed the flowers on their desk and sat on the couch which was just in the middle of the room.

“Did you guys have an argument?” I asked, concerned. He just looked at me and walked out the room with his room leaving me behind. The way he reacted confirmed my suspicions and now everything makes sense. He asked me to buy her flowers

because of the argument they had last night and he even took the risk of allowing me to drive without her permission.

“Mr Xulu!” the English teacher shouted and my head shot up only to realise that the whole class was looking at me.

“If you don’t want to participate in the class then I suggest you make your way to the door.” My mind was filled with the situation between mom and dad last night. She only came back at midnight and dad and I stayed up the whole time since we were worried to the point of insanity. We even went out to look for her at a point but didn’t find her so we went home and waited till she got there. I was drained both physically and emotionally.

“Alright.” I replied. The class seemed rather surprised when they saw me packing my books and exiting the classroom since I’ve always been the guy who’s going for prefect and passes with high marks. Not today.

.

Remember the girl I saw yesterday that looked familiar and didn't know whether I was greeting her or not? Well she was sitting on the stands alone, crying her heart out so I went to her.

"Uh – hi." I said awkwardly. "Remember me?" I asked with a smile. She looked at me for a while as though she forgot to breath and nodded before apologising.

"I am so sorry for not being in class. I – I'll leave now." She said while hurriedly wiping her tears and trying to get up but I stopped her and sat next to her.

"I got kicked out of class as well so I don't mind the company." She relaxed a bit and smiled faintly. "That is why you're crying, right?" she shook her head and tears flowed freely down her face again.

"It's – it's my classmates."

"What do they do?" I asked in concern.

"It's nothing." She said quickly and looked away. I held her chin and made her face me.

"You can tell me." I said sincerely and drew my hand back to myself.

“They – they bully me. Today I got kicked out of class because they flushed my homework down the toilet. So I had to lie and – I can’t tell anyone ‘cause – it’ll get worse.”

Have you ever been so angered by something that you form fists with your hands without realising it and can feel your blood boiling up inside you? Well that’s how I felt at the moment and I found it funny since I didn’t even know this girl. I didn’t even know her but the minute I saw her sitting alone here, crying, I wanted to reach out to her and now I want nothing more than to protect her. I don’t understand people who find happiness by inflicting pain on someone else. How on earth does that make you feel good about yourself? She had begun crying again so I pulled her close and hugged her. It was as if this triggered something in her which made her cry even more so I rubbed her back and whispered soothing words in her ear. It came naturally and the situation wasn’t awkward, at least for me it wasn’t. When she finally calmed down I let go of her and my shirt was wet from the tears. Embarrassed, she mumbled a thousand apologies.

“It’s okay. My name is Luxolo by the way.”

“Uh – I know. I’m Lutho.”

“You have a beautiful name. These bullies, who are they?”

“My classmates.” She replied after a moment of hesitation.
“Please don’t do anything. Just let them be, please.” She pleaded. I ignored her.

“Which grade are you in?” I asked with a smile.

“Uh – nine. Why?”

“Are you going to the V-ball?” she looked confused. “Valentine social.” I added but she shook her head.

“I understand what you were trying to say I just don’t understand why you’re asking.”

“Just answer the question.”

“Well – it’s compulsory isn’t it?”

“Of course. Mxm I forgot. Anyway I like you.” She was thrown aback by that.

“Uh – excuse me?”

“I like you and I want to protect you. I like you as a – sister. A little sister and I’d like to take you to the Valentines ball.”

“But – you hardly know me.”

“It doesn’t matter. What those girls are doing is wrong and if they do it again I need you to tell me yeva?” she nodded shyly and smiled.

“Thank you.” She said with tears flowing down. This time I laughed at her.

“You’re crying again.” She laughed along with me and wiped them away.

“They’re of joy this time.” she said.

“Well now I have to explain to my girlfriend why I won’t be going with her to the social. Wish me luck!” I said as I got up and stretched.

“Good luck big brother. And thank you.”

“You’re welcome little sis. I’m off now.” I said walking away with two fingers in the air.

.

“Uh – explain to me why you aren’t going to your social with me, again?” I sighed. Pam didn’t take the fact that I was going with another girl to the social as well as I thought she would. What made it worse was the fact that we were talking about it over the phone.

“She’s being bullied, babe. Now remember when I told you that the people in lower grades are intimidated by me because of my friends?”

“Yes?”

“Well I’m going to use that to my advantage. When they see her with me do you think they’ll touch her again since they think I’m this badass guy?” she sighed loudly and in an irritated manner.

“Isn’t there another way to do that?”

“I’m also pushing for prefect Pamela so it’ll be to my advantage if the lower grades are comfortable with me. I have a higher chance of being voted prefect don’t you think?” she remained silent so I carried on.

“If it makes you feel any better, she’s family zoned.”

“How?”

“I told her she’s my little sister and she calls me big brother so you can stop being so insecure.” She sighed once more.

“I was warned about things like this. Do whatever you want, Luxolo. After all I am only your girlfriend.”

Then the line went dead.

Chapter 5: Rage

Rage.

“Excuse me, you did what!” Amanda shouted with a mouth full of chips and I tilted my head back dramatically.

“Not you too! Of all people I thought you would be the one who understands!” she touched my shoulder.

“I love you, buddy, I really do. But there are boundaries.” She let go of my shoulder and ate her chips again before continuing.

“I mean you and Pam haven’t been together for more than a month but what do you do? You take another freaking girl and expect her to understand? I’d have done the same thing if I were her.”

“Amanda, dude! I’m trying to help someone here. I mean, you’re the one who told me that I intimidate people so I want to use that for good.” She shrugged slowly.

“Well... I hear you... but that doesn’t make it right...is there no other way to help her other than this?” I sighed.

“Such as?”

“I don’t know, dude. Something that won’t ruin the good thing that you and that chick, Pam have.”

“Ugh my mind is made up, Amanda. Besides I can’t just drop the poor girl. She’s a wreck, you should see her.”

“What’s her name again?”

“Lutho.” She looked deep in thought before asking, “Grade?”

“Nine.” I replied.

“Oh! That Lutho!” my face lit up at the realization that she knows her.

“You know her!” she nodded quickly.

“Yeah I do. Poor chick has been bullied since she got here.”

“Wait – you knew?”

“Duh.” She replied while rolling her eyes.

“And you did nothing about it?”

“What could I do? I mean it’s none of my business.” I just stared at her with a ridiculed expression.

“What?” she asked.

“Nothing. Nothing at all. I just thought you were better than this.” She shrugged once more.

“Then I guess you never truly know someone, right?” then she got up and left.

.

It was two days before the much anticipated V-ball. Everything seemed like it was falling apart but I kept a brave front and nobody noticed anything different. Mom and dad were arguing every single day. Spending time in the house was not something I did as much anymore since all I heard was shouting and what not. The day after mom disappeared dad got us a maid since he didn't want me being hungry because my mom has more important things to do than take care of my family. Lutho and I were getting along pretty well and the bullying had decreased since everyone heard that she was rolling with me. At least something good came from all this misery, right? I was spending more time with Blessing than I should have been as he was filling my head with crazy ideas and sharing his twisted mentality with me but that didn't stop me from going to his house often. Even his parents knew by now that after school and practice I'll be at his house and finish my homework there before going home.

.

I found Pam's attitude childish and shallow since she's only thinking about herself and not about the poor girl who's being bullied but apart from all that, I missed her.

"Uh – hi." I said after she answered her phone.

"Hey..." she said wearily.

“I miss you.” I said honestly.

“So – what do you want me to do, Luxolo? I mean you go ahead and ask another girl to your V-ball without discussing it with me first, what’s worse is that we haven’t even been dating for a month and you’re already doing this. What am I supposed to think? How am I supposed to feel? What happens later on the relationship? I just – I don’t want this kind of relationship, I’m sorry.” Those words shocked me so much that I jumped up from the couch and picked up the keys as I made my way to the car.

“What – what do you mean, Pamela?” she sighed.

“Nothing, Luxolo. Goodbye.” Then she hung up on me, again.

What I liked about our new maid was the fact that she minded her own business and only spoke when spoken to or when it’s really necessary so when I stormed out of the house she just waved goodbye and continued with the cooking. I drove to Pam’s hood and parked a few houses away from her house as normal then called her.

“Luxolo.” I sighed of relief. At least she answered.

“Please come outside, I’m where I usually drop you off.”

“What! What are you doing here?”

“Pam I need to talk to you, please.” She snarled.

“Fine. I’m coming.”

.

She was walking down the street towards me. Today she was different

that glow that I thought she had, that “I don’t care” attitude she always manages to carry, wasn’t there. Her eyes weren’t smiling today. I stood in front of the car with one leg in front of the other and took a deep breath when she got to me with her arms crossed.

Not knowing how to start, “Hi.” was all I could manage to say.

“You can’t drag me out of my home and make me walk across the street to tell me ‘Hi’.” She replied.

“I thought you would understand, Pam. She’s just a junior and what would I want to do with a junior? Seriously – you know how much being a prefect means to me. I’m sure –”

She cut me off before I could finish my sentence and said, “Being prefect? That’s all it is, right? That’s all I ever hear lately!” her head began bobbing in all directions and she kept waiting her manicured nails in front of my face but I kept my cool. “What you don’t understand is that Valentine’s day is about the whole love thing, this whole girlfriend and boyfriend thing! YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO ASK ME, X! YOUR GIRLFRIEND!

Here I am, waiting for you to ask me, feeling like the idiot. You could've at least asked me, X. That's the least you could do."

I figured trying to justify my actions at this point would be useless so I mumbled a sincere "I'm sorry." Then tried walking towards her but she took a step back and stared at me for a while with sad eyes.

"Yeah, sorry, that's supposed to fix everything, right?" when I said nothing she huffed and walked away.

"I love you Pam, okay?" Wait, nigga. What did I just say?

She paused, but didn't look back. And the fact that she didn't continue walking caused a spark of hope to flare up inside of me. She just stood there. Is she going to say it back?

"No, Luxolo."

"No?"

"Yes, no Luxolo. You can't spoil my FIRST Valentine's as a girl that's taken and tell me such. You can't get my hopes up like that and think those three words are just going to make everything better. You can't choose a junior over me and expect me to believe those words. You can't play with my feelings like that, I'm not allowing it." she said all this with her back to me and for some reason I was glad she did. I didn't want her to see how my face dropped when she was talking. I

didn't want her to see how everything else dropped along with my pride, ego and the spark of hope.

She walked away without looking back and took my beating heart with. This time I didn't even try to stop her

Chapter 6: Crystal Clear

Crystal Clear.

Mom and dad are at it again and I can hear their shouts through my closed bedroom door. That's how loud they were. I think they're under the impression that if they shout downstairs I wouldn't be able to hear them but unfortunately for them and me I can hear every word, crystal clear.

The fights have gotten worse since the day my mom came home at midnight. So bad that dad has been sleeping on the couch and leaves for work before anyone is up so naturally, transport arrangements had to change. I drive myself to and from school every day and I miss my family. But today was different, today, for some absurd reason, we're having breakfast at the same time and the only thing you can hear is the cutlery hitting our plates. Tension so bad it needs to be cut with a saw and I dare not say a word since I know that they'll put me on the spot.

Apart from that Pamela still isn't talking to me and I stopped calling her after she ignored my calls for a whole day. She'll come to me when she's ready but for now, I need to make sure

that Lutho has a dress and that my outfit for tonight is on point.

“Goodbye, parents.” I said as grabbed the keys and drove off to school.

.

“Hey, can I talk to you?” I said to Lutho as she was chilling with her friends and she smiled and got up. “This won’t be long.” I assured her friends and we walked a short distance before stopping.

“What’s up?” she asked with a genuine smile. Ever since the first day I saw her I’ve never seen her eyes smiling and today her lips smiled along with her eyes. They were beaming.

“Do you have a dress for tonight?” I asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“Alright then just text me your address and I’ll fetch you around – let’s say 18:00?” she chuckled.

“Kodwa it starts ngo 18:00 mos.”

“Exactly.” I said and she laughed. We fist bumped and I walked away to where I usually chilled and listened to music while everyone else was laughing and conversing amongst themselves. Remember when I said that I could carry on with life and nobody would notice that anything was wrong? Well,

that wall was gone. It had crumbled down and I didn't know where to begin by picking up the pieces so I isolated myself from everyone since the one person I actually needed at the time was being selfish. I felt so silly lately. Sulking all the time and crying over spilling milk since nothing was really broken yet – but it was in the process of being destroyed.

At the end of the day Amanda approached me and got in the front seat of the car without saying a word.

“Home?” I asked after starting the engine.

“No.” she replied, “the beach.”

“Alright, I'll drop you off then –” she shook her head and stopped me.

“No, I mean we should go there to talk. I miss you.” I looked at her with a bored expression.

“I hate the beach, Amanda. You know this.”

“But I need to talk to you.”

“Fine.” I replied and started the car without saying anything further. I drove to the mall and we went to Milky Lane for ice cream

“What is going on with you?”

“Life.” I replied simply and waited for her to say something else.

“You’re shutting me out, Luxolo. I want to be here for you but you aren’t letting me.” I rolled my eyes.

“It’s a pity I’m hearing the right words from the wrong person.” She looked taken aback for a while but quickly recovered when our orders came.

“Pam – what happened between you guys?” I stuffed my face with the ice cream and got the best brain freeze of my life.

“Exactly what you predicted. You can now say ‘I told you so.’ I won’t be mad.” Her upper body slumped down and she sighed sadly.

“I’m sorry you’re going through this. I’ve never seen you so depro before.” I huffed in anger.”

“I told her I loved her, Amanda!” I said as I banged the table causing a few people to look at us but I didn’t care. “I love her and I need her NOW but she’s so shallow and selfish that she doesn’t realise it when she’s found a good guy!”

“Maybe she doesn’t deserve you.” She said casually.

“Maybe. But then again – maybe she does. Love is twisted.” I said the fell silent again. We sat in complete silence until our ice cream was done then I took her home.

The first thing I did when I got home was check for any texts from Pam but my inbox was filled with messages from everyone else but her. I read Lutho's text since it was her address and went to take a shower since it was almost time to go and a gentleman is never late – apparently.

.

“Hey, you're on time!” Lutho said while grabbing my arm and dragging me inside the house, “my mother is dying to meet you!” she exclaimed and I just smiled.

“Mama nanku ke.” She said excitedly, “the instant big brother I told you about.” Her mom smiled and came to hug me.

“Oh Luxolo! I have heard so much about you!” I smiled stupidly.

“Only good things I hope.”

“Fantastic things only my boy. Please take a seat.” She offered and I checked the time but sat down anyway.

“Mama I'm going to fetch my bag quickly I'll be right back.” Her mom nodded and turned her attention back to me.

“Uh – Lutho told me a lot about you. Thank you for doing this for her.”

“Doing what

mama?" I asked. Ruining my relationship with someone I love for someone I hardly know?

"For helping with the bullying. She was really miserable before you came along."

"Oh. No it's my pleasure mama." She smiled once more and insisted on taking pictures of us before we left. By the time we left the house it was already 18:25 so I tried driving fast.

"Are you okay, bro?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm fine." I replied with a smile and turned on the radio so she wouldn't try talking any further. → `X

I'm here, dancing with another girl, and all that's on my mind is Pam. What is she doing? Who is she with? Does she even miss me? How is she? Is she with someone else? All these questions are going through my head. Although I'm still mad at her I'm just glad we aren't in the same school because then she'd see me dancing with Lutho.

We were halfway through the social and this was the slow dancing part. We only danced for a while when a guy from grade 10 came up to us and asked to dance with her. I'd like to believe that if I hadn't reached out to Lutho he wouldn't have the guts to come up to me and ask but since I'm rolling with grade 9's he, and any other kid, were more comfortable with me. Mission accomplished.

"Of course. You can have her for as long as you like." She seemed shocked by that but nodded and took her hand.

"Lutho – behave." She giggled and nodded. "Just call or text me when you want to leave neh?"

"I will." She replied and I turned around and left. I didn't know where I was going but partying didn't feel right at the moment since I didn't even know what was going on with Pam and me.

"Wait!" Blessing shouted and I stopped since I was going to the car. "Dude, uyaphi?"

"I don't know." I replied honestly.

"Well you aren't going anywhere. Yiza joe they're about to announce this Mr and Mrs Valentine shit. Or whatever it is you'll leave when the event it over."

"Ey Sibusiso kodwa." I said in irritation but he wouldn't budge and I gave in. everyone was slow dancing with someone so I

bought a burger from the shop since they brought it inside the hall and watched everyone have a good.

The night seemed a bit too long for my liking. Mr and Mrs Valentine were announced and they were the power couple of the school, both in matric and they looked very proper if may say so myself.

Blessing didn't dare leave my side the whole and tried all he could to cheer me up. He didn't ask me about Pam since he knew that she made me like this. Well I ended up dancing and enjoying myself for the remainder of the night. Just like every other year students smuggled alcohol into the venue and when they got tipsy, things began happening. I assume the room was becoming a bit too hot since clothes were slowly but surely being taken off and the dancing became hot as well. Normally, I would try to stop it but it clicked that I wasn't even prefect yet so they'll have to deal with it.

.

PLEASE TAKE ME HOME. Lutho's text read and I texted her back telling her to go to the car, I was gonna join her just now. She replied with a 'K' and I was instantly turned off so I decided to take more time than I would have. Do not give me one word answers.

"Blessing, I'm about to bounce so I'll see you Monday, yeah?"

“Well I was thinking we could go out tonight. After you drop the kid off.” He said putting emphasis on the word ‘kid’. I chose to ignore him.

“Okay. I’ll call you.” I had no idea what I had just got myself into but nonetheless I walked to the car and Lutho was busy smooching this guy on my car. She was leaning on the passenger door and he was hovering over her since she was short. The sight made me laugh a bit since I’ve never kissed a girl before and two people who were younger than me were doing it on my car. Ah, the irony. I put on a serious face and pulled him off of her. They both looked shocked and I shook my head and threw him to the other side.

“This is a school event. If you want to make out, do it at your own time.” I said calmly. “Lutho, you hardly know this guy kodwa you’re kissing him in public ubusy nalenkenkwe. Stop acting cheap and get inside the car.” Talk about being a hypocrite. I would have kissed Pam on our first date if she allowed me. I clicked my tongue when I looked at him and joined Lutho in the car.

“I’m sorry.” She pleaded while playing with her fingers.

“I thought you respected me a bit more than this.” I said as I drove out the gates without even looking at her.

“I – I couldn’t stop him, buti.”

“Couldn’t or wouldn’t?” she remained silent for a while.

“Please don’t tell my mother?”

“Why the hell not, Lutho! Why not? If you knew what you were doing was wrong in the first place why go through with it?” she remained quiet once more and it was like this until we got to her house. I parked in front of the house and stopped the engine.

“Uhm – uyangena?”

“No.” I replied with a straight face. “And I won’t tell your mother.” I added.

“Thank you so much!” she squealed and tried to kiss my cheek but I reacted immediately and held her back with both my hands on her shoulders.

“I think you should leave now.” She looked embarrassed and I enjoyed seeing her this way. She mumbled ‘I’m sorry,’ once more then exited.

I drove away with an unexplainable grin on my face.

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I called Blessing and he told me that they’re at Siya’s house who was home alone for the weekend. I drove straight there and left my coat in the car.

“My nigga!” they all chanted catching me off guard.

“My niggas!” I shouted back and we all fist bumped. I soon realised what Blessing was trying to do when alcohol and hubbly was taken out.

I laughed in disbelief and shook my head.

“I don’t do this crap, majita. You know this.” They laughed at me and produced me with juice. We chilled and they smoked and drank while we were talking about embarrassing moments in our lives and what – not. My mood changed when they began talking about girls.

“Okay, guys. I think I’m gonna call it a night.” I announced. Since most of them were tipsy by now they swore at me and I simply laughed at them. ‘I don’t understand why I’m friends with people like this.’ I thought but brushed it off.

“Anyone need a ride?” I asked out of concern since I was the only sober person there. They all mumbled that they would be sleeping over so I left.

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I was all cuddled up with my teddy bear when my phone rang. I groaned and searched for it under the pillow.

“Hello.” I mumbled without checking the caller. The person on the other side was sniffing and I sat up when I checked who it

was. Pam. My heart leapt up to my throat and I couldn't manage to utter a single word.

"I love you too." She blurted.

Chapter 7: [M]ake [A]nd [D]estroy

[M]ake [A]nd [D]estroy.

“Wha -” my voice was shaking so I cleared my throat and tried again. “What?” she sniffed again and continued.

“I love you, Luxolo Xulu. And – and now that we don’t talk anymore I realized I was in love with you. Because I couldn’t put words on what I felt when I lost you.” There was silence for a while and I shook my head.

“I can’t do this right now, Pam. Goodnight.” Then I hung up like she would do me.

Pam’s POV

Make and destroy. I didn’t want to get involved with him. He was that guy and I was just this girl, that makes no sense... but he seemed so sincere, he seemed so fragile. For once, just once, I wanted someone who was as sensitive as he was, someone who would get angry at stupid little things. Someone who would be more emotional than I was... I didn’t want to get involved with him because I know I’m going to hurt him. I’m going to break his heart. And when he said, “I love you”, it was like he was inviting me to hurt him. Maybe that’s why I stormed

off. But as the days went by, I realised I actually loved him... or did I miss him? Or was it lust? Whatever, I'm a mess anyway.

I can't say I was surprised when he hung up on me but I was a bit hurt. I stared at my screen for the longest time ever before placing it face down underneath my pillow and getting off my bed to take a cold shower. My family isn't rich but we aren't poor either so I have everything I need because my parents ensure that I don't feel left out on anything. That doesn't change the fact that they're annoyingly protective. I'm in freaking grade 11 and I get beaten up for having a boyfriend! Give me a break. I undressed and let the cool water run down my skin as I thought about my boyfriend. My scars were now almost invisible and they got better after he 'kissed' me using his hands. I laughed a bit as I thought back to that day. He is so fragile, I've never met someone like him and that makes him special.

"Pamela!" my mom shouted and I quickly covered myself with a towel because I knew she was going to walk in without knocking, and she did.

"Haibo wahlamba a few minutes after midnight? Kwenzeka ntoni ngempilo yakho?" she asked while wrapping her gown tighter around herself.

"And why kubanda kangaka? Buhlamba with cold water?" she didn't wait for me to reply but carried on. "Are you sick?" she

asked while waking up to me and feeling my temperature.
“I’m fine mama.” I removed her hand and moisturised my body with her still looking at me.
“We’ll talk in the morning.” She said before kissing my forehead and exiting.

GOODNIGHT X. I LOVE YOU. <3

I was under my blankets when I sent that text and I shed a tear while writing it. The following morning I woke up later than usual and the first thing I did was check whether he had replied or not. To my disappointment he had read it but didn’t reply which just sent a sharp pain through my heart. Nonetheless I got up with and did all I needed to do with a heavy heart. All this time I was mad at Luxolo and I had convinced myself that I had the right to be mad at him. How dare he take another girl to a Valentine’s social without consulting me? How dare he make excuses for himself by telling me he was trying to help her? How dare he tell me he loves me when he treats me this way! But the more and more I thought of it the more and more it made sense. And – the more I realise how good a heart he has. To save a girl from being bullied by putting our relationship at risk, that speaks volumes about his character. It’s a pity I only realised that after treating him the way that I did. After saying the things that I said, I swallowed my pride once more and called with crossed fingers.

“Talk to me.” He said and I stuttered not knowing what to say.
“It’s Pam.” I said.

“Technology is rather advanced these days since one can see their callers name on the screen when being called. I’m just saying.” he replied coldly.

“Luxolo I am sorry for -”

“Pam – just stop, okay? Stop.” He said.

“No, Luxolo I need to talk to you. I need to see you and – and touch you. I need your presence. Please...” I pleaded and he was silent for a while.

“Normal place in 30 minutes.” He said with a flat tone and my heart leapt up to my throat.

“Okay! Okay I’ll see you there.” I said excitedly. “Oh, and X?”

“Yes?” he answered.

“I love you.” I said with the hope of hearing him say it back.

“Thanks.” He replied and hung up.

I got there first which was a first because I always find him there patiently waiting for me. But I understand though. I sat on the swing and went through my pictures when I realised we don’t have any today.

“He’s 15 minutes late.” I said to myself and was shocked when I heard a voice behind me.

“So were you on our first date.” I jumped up when I heard his voice and threw my arms around him. His cologne was so

familiar I'd recognise it anywhere. He looked decent and sexy. He only patted my back gently and I let go, embarrassed.

"Fuck you, Pam." He said with sadness in his eyes. I took a step back and just stared at him.

"Wh – what?" I stuttered. Last time I checked he despised swearing.

"Fuck you for leaving me when I needed you the most!" he shouted and I was lost for words. My tongue got stuck in my throat and tears naturally rolled down my eyes. Not knowing what to do I threw my arms around him once more and he held on to me like it was our last goodbye.

"I am so sorry. I – I was selfish and didn't think - " he cut me short by placing his lips on mine gently then holding my head on both sides like he usually does. I was still thrown aback and the tears had stopped flowing.

"I love you, Pam. Don't ever leave me again." I nodded quickly but remained silent and he engulfed me in yet another bone crushing hug.

'One day someone is going to hug you so tight. That all your broken pieces will stick back together.'

Today is that 'one day.' It could not be more perfect.

X's POV

It's crazy how one person can walk into your life and change the way you do things. Invade your life, with your permission, invade your heart and stay there. And the most terrifying thing is the thought that they could walk out of your life and never turn back and you sit there wondering where you went wrong. When Pam said the things that she said to me I had already forgiven her and the apology just sealed the deal. We were walking hand in hand in the mall that very same day, the 15th of February when I saw Lutho walking with that dude from yesterday.

"Babe?" I said while nudging her with my elbow.

"Yeah?" she responded by looking up at me.

"Remember the girl I went with to the social?" she nodded.

"There she is." I said pointing at them.

"The one walking with that guy?" I nodded and she smiled.

"She's beautiful." I responded by squeezing her hand and walking over to them.

"Fam!" I shouted when I got to them and we hugged briefly.

"Wassup' bruh?" I said to the guy and we fist bumped.

"This is my lovely girlfriend, Pam." She smiled shyly and waved at them.

"Pam this is my little sister, Lutho and...?"

"Junior." The guy said.

“Junior.” I repeated.

“I’ve heard a lot about you

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sis’ Pam. It’s an honour to finally meet you.” Lutho said with a grin on her face. Pam looked taken aback but quickly recovered.

“Uhm – I’m happy to hear that. Thank you.” She said with a smile.

“Anyway, we’re being rude to Junior. We should leave now.”

“Nah don’t worry about me I quite enjoy you guys’ company. Where are you going maybe we can spend the day together?” forward much?

“We don’t really have anything planned so we’ll do what we feel like doing.” I responded.

“Well we’re going to the beach.” Lutho said as she showed us her bag which I assume was filled with clothes.

“I’d like to go the beach!” Pam said excitedly.

“And we’d love for you to come with us.” Junior added. The decision was left with me.

“Uh – you guys can go ahead. We’ll see if we can make it through.” Pam looked at me in confusion and I avoided eye contact. “See you at school.” I said quickly and we walked past.

“What was that about?” Pam asked and pulled me back so I would stop and pay attention to her.

“Nothing. I just want to spend time with you, alone. I missed you.” I said as I planted a kiss on her forehead.

“I love you.” She smiled widely and lay her head on my chest.

“I love you too.”

“You know, I just realised that we don’t have any pictures together.” She laughed.

“That’s funny cause I was thinking the exact same thing while waiting for you.” I laughed along with her.

“It’s a sign. Come closer.” I said and she did so. We were back at the park and she made me sit in this uncomfortable position where my legs were crossed over each other just so we were sitting opposite each other. When we took pictures she sat in between my legs and she took a freaking lot.

“Okay Pam it’s over, babe! Yoh I’m out of poses next thing you know I’ll be pouting because of lack of poses.” She laughed hard and I ended up joining her.

“Okay one more.” She said and took it while we were laughing.

“Done,” she said and gave me my phone. “And don’t forget to send them to me.”

“Pam, my data.” I said while trying to sulk. She slapped my shoulder flirtatiously and told me to shut up.

The rest of the day was pure bliss. We made some crazy memories but it was all too short lived when she had to leave.

We played all the way to the car as usual and we drove in

silence until a song played on the radio.

“Oh my goodness I love this song!” she said and turned up the volume.

“But sometimes, I just want somebody to hold,

Someone to give me the jacket when it’s cold,

Got that young love even when we’re old.

So if you’re out there I swear to be good to you,

But I’m done looking, for my future someone.

Cause when the time is right you’ll be here

But for now, dear no one, this is your love song.”

She sang along with her angelic voice and I paid attention to the lyrics until the song was done.

“That’s my favourite song.” She said with a smile.

“The name? It’s a beautiful song. She has a nice voice and so do you.” She blushed.

“It’s Dear No One by Tori Kelly. I hope you were listening to the lyrics.” I chuckled a bit.

“Yep I was. Don’t worry.” We arrived at her house but she stayed for another ± 20 minutes just talking. I mentioned nothing of what was going on with my parents because I didn’t want to spoil the moment.

“Well I have to go now.” She said somberly.

“Yeah. I’ll call you.” I said as I kissed her cheek and she exited the car. I waited until she was inside her house before driving off.

I whistled all the way home and braced myself for the worst when I walked through that door. My attitude went from 0-100 real quick when I heard their shouts from the bedroom. I blocked out the words because I didn't know what they were arguing about and I didn't want to. What if it's someone that I don't want to hear or if they're arguing because of me? No can do.

I silently went up to my room and locked the door.

Mom's POV

"You're drinking again!" John, my husband shouted and he grabbed the bottle I was holding before throwing it on the floor. It broke as soon as it hit the ground, obviously. The glasses seemed to be flying around rather slowly and I was hurt because it wasn't even empty.

"You've always had an anger problem." I pointed out and this angered him further. I was significantly drunk at the time that I was seeing double of everything. I tried getting up from the couch to the bed but I stumbled right back onto the couch and began crying.

"Thulisile..." John said as he kneeled in front of me with his hands on my thighs. I pushed him back weakly.

“Do NOT touch me, John!” I had hiccups so there were spaces between everything that I was saying. I was now crying hysterically because of the alcohol as well as the pain that I was feeling.

“You made me this way! You... it’s all you. I just want to know, why?”

He acted dumb and asked, “Why, what?”

“Sundenza naar man John! Why did you cheat! Why did you choose her!” he got up and sat next to me.

“I – I’m sorry.”

“You don’t break someone and expect sorry to fix everything. I remember the first day we met like it was yesterday.” I smiled through the tears as I reminisced about the good old days.

“The effect you had on me was incredible. I had these butterflies every time I saw you and I’d turn around and walk the other way. Until one day you decided to come and talk to me. Thixo wam that was one of the most cherished moments of my life.” I looked at him and he was crying silently beside me.

“We were in love, John. Once I our lives we were in love and it was the best feeling ever! But then you messed up. You – you cheated on me with my arch enemy because we had one stupid argument.”

“I know the story. Please don’t -”

“No, let me remind you of our past.” I retorted. “You slept with her to get back at me! But I forgave you because I love you! I

have always loved you, I still do but that isn't enough."

"Don't say that!" he shouted.

"No! No, John you went back to her! You went back to her while married to me. Now that - that is too much! Now I am going to ask you again, why! Why her! Why did you cheat on me!" I said angrily. I was digging my nails into the couch to keep myself from digging them into myself or him.

He stared at me and I waited for him to answer me.

"It's – it's because we can't have children." I slapped the living daylights out of him.

"By 'we' you actually mean ME!" I shouted and slapped him again and again. The alcohol had taken its toll on my mind because I was slapping and punching him everywhere while screaming, letting all the anger out. He held my hands and tried stopping me until I finally gave up.

"Thulisile stop! Please stop. Luxolo is upstairs."

"You don't give a shit about Luxolo, man don't tell me to stop!"

I freed my hands from his grip and got up.

"Where are you going?" he asked with tears running down his face. I ignored him and went to our en-suite bathroom to rinse my face. I was a hot mess. The make-up was smeared all over and my eyes were swollen. I got out and he was in the same position that I left him in.

"I want a divorce." I said and locked the bathroom door then took a shower.

Chapter 8: Escape

Escape

Mom's POV

I was curled up on the floor in the shower with lukewarm water running down my body. I was crying like a broken hearted teenage girl. I know this because it's what I did when he broke my heart for the first time when we were teenagers. I wasn't sure if I really wanted a divorce but I knew that I wanted the pain to stop. I got on my knees and vomited in the shower.

"Ew." I said to myself and got up to actually take a shower this time. When I got out I was feeling drowsy so I simply wrapped a towel around myself and got into bed. John wasn't in the room anymore and the broken bottle was still on the floor. I fell asleep while thinking about my son.

“Mama? ” Luxolo said as he shook me. I opened one eye and looked at him.

“What is it?” I asked and closed my eyes again. I had the mother of all headaches and I couldn’t wait for him to leave.

“I’d like you to meet my girlfriend, please? I’m ready to introduce her to you.”

“What’s the time, Luxolo?” I asked with my eyes still closed.

“It’s 10:40.” I sat up straight.

“What! AM?” I said as I got out of bed and realised that I was in my pyjamas.

“Mama.” Luxolo said calmly.

“I am so late for work! Why did you not wake me up! Why didn’t your father wake me, oh Nkosi yam I’m definitely getting fired today!” I shouted with tears rushing down my face as I searched for my slippers under the bed.

“Mama it’s Sunday! You don’t work on Sundays!” he shouted.

“Oh...” I said and wiped my tears. “I just... I’m sorry.” I said and sat down with my back to him. He came to sit next to me and made me look at him.

“What’s going on?” he asked with concern in his voice.

“Nothing.” I said with a smile and kissed his forehead. “Now let me take a shower. I don’t want your girlfriend to meet me looking like this.”

“And smelling like this. Have you been drinking again?” he asked. My eyes involuntarily shifted to where the broken bottle was and there was no trace of it.

“Yes.” I answered honestly. “Uh – so I need to take a shower. I’ll be with you now.” He nodded sadly and exited the room.

‘I am never drinking again!’ I thought to myself while running the bath water and dove in. I laughed at myself shortly afterwards because that was what I said the previous time.

People have different types of problems so naturally they deal with them in different ways. Should it be sex, drugs, self-harm or even inflicting pain on someone else but they all have the same goal in mind – to make the pain go away. Even if it’s for a little while but it needs to go. My escape was alcohol. John and I had problems for years now but we kept a happy and strong front for Luxolo. Some things just can’t be fixed by a simple ‘I’m sorry.’ And I hoped he understood that. I still loved him but

sometimes that just isn't enough. Not even when you've been married for as long as we were. I was out of the bath and already dressed up to meet Luxolo's girlfriend when I noticed that my hair was staying on the comb more than usual. I panicked and pulled it from my head and came back with a bit of it.

I tilted my head back a bit to keep the tears from falling out and settled for a head doek. I was a master at tying it so I'd like to think that I still looked beautiful.

When I walked out John was sitting on the already made bed and got up as soon as he saw me.

"You look beautiful." He pointed out and I said thank you then made my way to the door.

"Thuli?" he said and I turned back.

"Yes?" I responded.

"Could we please act normal around each other for now? Just until we tell him." I sighed loudly and nodded. He came towards me and awkwardly held my hand as if asking for permission. I locked my fingers around his and we walked out. Hand-in-hand.

Mom's POV

The feeling of our hands entangled in each other just too familiar and I stole a glance at him only to notice he was looking at me as well. We were seated on the couch while X went to fetch Pam at the mall.

"I don't understand why we're holding hands." I pointed out and snatched it away.

"Thulisile I am sorry. I'll do anything - just please, don't divorce me ndiyakucela. It was a stupid mistake, please. We have a family and a son that loves us and that we love. Please!" he pleaded but I ignored him.

"I need a drink." I stated as I got up to pour myself a glass of wine leaving him staring at nothing. They came back while I was busy preparing the table, since this was so unexpected I didn't have much time to prepare anything so there was just biscuits and juice.

“Mama!” X shouted from the lounge and I showed up with the glass in my hand. John walked up to me and held my hand.

“I’ll take that.” He said and took the glass from my hand.

“Let’s sit down.” I said with a beaming smile. This girl – there was something about her. I’ve always heard people saying that the intuition of a mother is never to be ignored but I decided to ignore it since I had more than one glass of wine already.

X’s POV

Mom and dad looked happy and anyone else would have bought it but I knew that they were fronting but I said and did nothing.

“Pam, darling, please come and help me with the things in the kitchen.” Pam looked at me and I looked at dad.

“Of course, Mrs Xulu.” They both went to the kitchen and I looked at dad.

“What’s going on?”

“Haibo! Since when do I share what’s happening between your mother and I with you?” he asked and switched on the TV. Now I was certain that something was wrong. They came back with the snacks and placed them on the table.

“Ah, this looks lovely.” Dad pointed out and kissed my mom’s cheek. She stared at him with a fake smile and he looked away, embarrassed.

We all dug in while they were bombarding her with questions. Pam was answering all of them honestly but you could see that she was nervous. I squeezed her hand and she smiled and relaxed a bit.

In my opinion that was more of a formal interrogation than just meeting the parents. Mom and dad were awkward, Pam was a nervous wreck and I was trying to figure out what was going on with my parents.

“Uh – I apologise for being rude

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Mr and Mrs Xulu,” Pam said as she got up from the couch, “but I have to leave now before my parents get worried.” It was just

past four so it was obvious that she just wanted to leave. Mom got up and gave her a hug.

“Thank you so much for coming. I’d love to meet you again.” Pam chuckled nervously and smiled.

“Uh – I’m sure we will, Ma’am. Goodbye, sir.” She went to shake my father’s hand and I gave her the keys to the car while I went to fetch my wallet upstairs.

“I need a drink.” Mom stated and walked over to the kitchen.

“No you aren’t.” dad said and followed her.

“I don’t think your mom likes me much.” Pam said sadly as soon as I drove out the gate.

“What! She loved you, babe. Stop playing.” She smiled faintly and looked at me.

“You think so?”

“I know so, babe.” she was silent for a while then opened her mouth to say something but closed it again.

“Say it.” I said with a chuckle.

“Remember the song we were listening to yesterday?”

“Dear No One?” I asked.

“Yes. Uhm – this is going to sound rather cheesy but you’re my no one.” She said that then held my other hand. The one that wasn’t driving, obviously, and I grinned like an idiot because I didn’t know what to say. I dropped her off at her house and drove back home.

I took a deep breath before entering the house and it was silent for once. I made my way to their room and heard my dad say, “You have to get hurt. That’s how you learn. The strongest people out there, the ones who laugh the hardest with a genuine smile, those are the people who have fought the toughest battles. Because they’ve decided that they’re not going to let anything hold them down, they’re showing them who’s the boss.” My mom was silent for a very long time that I thought she wasn’t going to reply.

“You are a fucking hypocrite, John Xulu! You destroy me, then tell me that?” she sighed and continued. “We’re going to tell him, tonight.” I was confused and rather hurt to hear my mother talk to my father like that so I pushed the door open and fell in causing them to look at me with shock engraved on their faces.

“Tell me what?”

Chapter 9: Unpredictable

Unpredictable.

At times, life doesn't turn out as we think that it would. We get different people and different situations. Some make or destroy us. But at the end of the day we have to accept things the way that they are. This was one of them but I refused to accept it.

Mom looked at my father and waited for him to talk.

"Can – could we not do this now?" my father pleaded but my mom looked at me and stretched out her hand so I could hold it.

"No, mama what is going on! Tata! " I felt agitated and them not talking wasn't making the situation any better. Mom began crying again and I didn't know what to do so I went up to her to comfort her.

"Tell him, John. Mxelele the type of man you really are." I looked at my father and realised that his bags were packed.

"Someone please tell me what the hell is going on! Tata your bags?" I shouted.

“Your mother wants a divorce and she wants me to leave.”
Now I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t expecting this but that didn’t make the pain of receiving the news any better. I tightened my jaw and asked the question, “Why?” he looked at me then my mother then back at me.

“Because – I was unfaithful to her and to our marriage.”

Could someone please explain to me why a person gets married only to be looking for something else while inside the marriage? I fail to understand why a happily married man would cheat on a woman that he claims to love every day.

“Was this whole marriage a lie!” I asked as I stood up and charged towards him with tears rushing down my face. “Why did you do it, Tata! Why! What happened to all the things that you taught me about being a man! Is this what you meant by it! Huh! Is this the kind of man I’ll be one day!” he just took his bag and dragged his suitcase to the door.

“It was a moment of weakness, son. If I could turn back the hands of time then I would. Trust me, I would. I love your mother – but sometimes that just isn’t enough.” he was looking at my mom the whole time while saying that and she was lying on the couch just staring at him.

He then pushed me aside and dragged his bags behind him. I stood in front of the front door and tried reasoning with him.

“Tata, if you walk out this door things will spiral out of control and you know this. If you walk out this door mom will be an alcoholic and God knows what is going to happen to me with dealing ngayo yonke lento alone. If you walk out this door – I’ll never see you the same way ever again. You’ll lose the little respect that I have for you and -” I took a deep breath, “and things will never be the same again in this family and you know it.”

“Luxolo some things aren’t meant to be understood by teenagers. Now, when I walk out that door you will respect and love me just the way you have for all your life. You will be able to deal with everything and you will be strong for your mother. Are we clear?” he pushed me away and stepped out of the door.

I have been through a lot of crap in my life and trust me when I say that I know pain. I just seem to be reliving it over and over again unnecessarily and every time a tiny part of me dies along with whatever is destroying me. When my father walked out that door he took more heart from me than he could imagine. How can a man be so cruel? As I was standing by that same door, watching him drive away with half my heart, I vowed never to be like my father, ever.

I went back to my mom's room and she was biting her nails and crying like a crazy woman with a glass of wine next to her.

"Is he gone?" she asked without even looking up.

"Yes, I tried stopping him, mama I really did kodwa he has his mind made up." She smiled faintly and nodded.

"He best stay away." Then she lifted up her glass before gulping it down.

It's been a month since dad moved out. He came back to fetch the rest of his stuff and assured me that he'll pay my school fees, I'll get my monthly allowance and that he still loves us. I didn't talk to him though. He did all the talking and left. Mom's drinking problem had become worse. If it weren't for our maid then I would go to bed hungry every night. She lived at our house full time now and she took care of my mother better than I could have.

Her behaviour changed drastically and so did her weight. Her appetite changed, she procrastinated and avoided responsibilities, she drank more and ate less

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bit her nails habitually and had all these different aches. This was all a bit too much for me but I tried being there for her as much as I could. My relationship with Pam was taking strain, obviously since all this was happening in my life all at once.

We were in the car and about to go to town when she began tripping.

“Luxolo, what have I done? You’re so distant these days that I feel like I don’t even know you!”

“Shut up, Pam I don’t want to argue with you!” I shouted.

“Excuse me? Why!”

“Because you’re beautiful!” I shouted back and she looked lost for words before laughing and looking out the window.

I made her look at me and kissed her passionately before looking into her eyes.

“I love you.” I said honestly and he hugged me.

“I love you too.”

“No, babe I mean it. You’re the only thing that’s keeping me sane at this point and – I appreciate you sticking around through all the bull crap.” She let go and looked at me.

Somewhere along the way we bumped into Amanda and she hugged me in front of my girlfriend.

“Uh – babe, this is my friend Amanda.”

“This is Pam? Akasemhle! Hi, I’m his best friend!” she said with a smile and hugged Pam as well.

“Oh that’s nice. I’ve never heard about you.” Amanda looked at me and gave me that ‘The Kevin Hart Look.’ Some of you may know it but some not.

“Mxm he’s an ass anyway.” She said and punched my shoulder.

“Anyway I came to invite you to my little brothers party. It’s a birthday party so yeah come in your sexiest outfit.” She looked at pam while saying this and they both laughed.

“It’s Saturday. And Luxolo you know where I live so yeah. Bye.” She hugged Pam one last time and left..

“That Amanda girl is really nice.” Pam said as she took a bite of her burger. “And pretty.” She added on.

“Yeah.” Was all I said.

“Why didn’t you tell me about her?”

“I wanted you to meet all my friends at the same time but yeah...” I replied.

“Thank you for this.” She said with a smile.

“You’re welcome.” She put her burger down.

“What’s going on with you?” she asked in an irritated manner.

“Nothing. Why?”

“I can see that something is bothering you, X. Please let me in?” she pleaded and I closed my eyes for a bit and opened them again to find her staring at me. Demanding an answer with her eyes but I couldn’t tell her that my home was busy breaking.

“Could we please just enjoy this and not talk about – stuff?” I asked with a smile and she banged the table.

“Flip, Luxolo! You’re always telling me that I’m your place of sanity away from anything that’s driving you insane but I don’t

even know what that 'something' is!" she shouted and people looked at us.

"You're causing a scene." I pointed out and she stood up.

"So what! It's not like you care, anyway! Mxm and here I was thinking you were different. You're just like every other guy. Don't call me again, Luxolo I don't want anything to do with you." Then she stormed out. I was left there with my mouth open and I was beyond myself with embarrassment. I asked the waiter for two take-outs and left shortly afterwards.

I don't know if I'm the only person that's experienced this but have you ever 'lost' someone but deep down you know that they're still yours? Well that's the mentality I had when Pam stormed out of that restaurant and told me it's over. I've learned to deal with her mood swings and I was just hoping that this was one of them. I had just got home after a while of depressed driving and found my mom drinking from the bottle.

"Mama." I said with a shaky voice and took the bottle away from her. She just let me and smiled.

"You know, I couldn't have asked for a better son."

“I know.”

I threw her arm over my shoulder and practically dragged her to her room. I think the maid was in her room ‘cause I was struggling. When we got to her room I opened the blankets for her and tucked her in.

“Luxolo.” She mumbled with her eyes closed.

“Ma?” I responded and sat next to her.

“I never wanted you to see me like this, and I’m sorry you have to.” She cleared her throat and looked at me.

“I love you, through everything just know that I love you. Your past...”

“Please don’t remind me.” I asked and she held my hand.

“I’m not going to sana lwam kodwa someone is going to and when that person does I need to be strong, okay?”

“Why are you talking like this? You’re worrying me.”

“Because I have to, X.” she sighed. “I’m a wreck and I won’t be able to deal with a lot of things right now. I need you to be a man, Luxolo. Since your father refuses to be one you’re going to be a man. I’m sorry that you have to grow up so fast it was never my intention.” I slept with her that night since I can’t sleep alone and we talked all night. I told her about how Pam broke up with me over something as stupid as that and she told

me that there's something about her but she just doesn't know what then she advised me to buy her flowers. Cliché but it works. My mom had taken leave from work so our/her driver wasn't working.

Yesterday Pam mentioned that she was home alone for the day and I took this as a chance to go and 'win' her back since I 'lost' her.

After school I called her and she answered after I tried five times.

"Yes?" she answered.

"I want to take you on a date. Like a formal date to make up for yesterday."

"I broke up with you yesterday so..."

"I get that but let's just have one last date – a proper one – before we let each other go." I said as a joke and she was hesitant.

"You want to let me go?"

“I want to do whatever you want. I’ll even bring you flowers.”
She huffed.

“I hate flowers. I thought you knew this.” I smiled.

“Alright then, no flowers. Just you and I on a formal date,
tonight, wear your best dress. I’ll pick you up at 18:30.” I said
and hung up.

Chapter 10: Flowers

Flowers.

“So you went back to her, huh?” Blessing said as he threw me the ball. We were playing basketball in his backyard, yes, he has a court in his backyard. That’s how rich he is.

“I love her, mfethu. You don’t understand.”

“You’re right, I don’t. ‘Cause she dumped your ass at first sign of trouble and you’re going back to her. Hai you’re confused about life.” I threw the ball and it scored.

“Mxm.” Was all I said.

“You know you’re going to end up being like me, right?” he pointed out and I shook my head rapidly.

“Sleep around with naïve girls because I had my heart broken? Nah fam I’m not about that life.” I said and he laughed bitterly.

“We’ll see about that.” He said and suggested that we stop playing and just talk so we sat by the pool.

“Uh – how are you, bruh? Like how are you really?” I tilted my head back dramatically and sighed.

“How am I? I am a wreck. My mother is turning into an alcoholic. In fact no, she already is an alcoholic and I don’t even know if she was fired or if she actually got leave.” He was looking at me the whole time, paying extra attention.

“My father – dude I don’t know that man anymore. It’s a pity that I realised that after so many years. I’m afraid that I’m going to grow up and become like him one day, and I don’t want that bruh I really don’t. My mother is falling apart and I feel so helpless ‘cause I feel like I’m taking away her escape when taking away the alcohol. I know it sounds stupid but...” I stopped talking and he remained silent as well.

“You do know that you’ll get through this, right? You’re always telling me that you know pain and that you’ve been through worse. That’s why I fuck with you, you don’t let life bring you down and this time you aren’t only strong for yourself but your mother as well. Your father is a good man, he’ll come around and if he doesn’t? Well, hell it wasn’t meant to be. So chin the fuck up and deal with this the like the man you really are, it’s not too early or anything. You can get through this.” He said and I laughed from disbelief.

“I should talk to you more often.” I said and he bowed his head in acknowledgement.

“Yes you should.”

We talked about other less depressing things and it was finally time for me to leave. I drove home and checked on my mother who was drinking wine from a glass this time and kissed her forehead before going up to my room and taking a shower. I got dressed in what I thought would be called my best outfit and left after I asked the maid to please not leave my mother's side.

I parked in front of Pam's house and hid the 'flowers' behind me. I knocked on the front door and the door was opened immediately by some girl.

"Luxolo! Is that you?" she fixed her hair dramatically and handed me her hand' "I'm Anelisa. You can call me Ane or Lisa. Whatever rocks your boat." I shook her hand and chuckled at her personality. She's so out there compared to Pam.

“I can’t believe you’re still here. Most guys are gone after a month kodwa shame I admire your perseverance.”

“Uh – excuse me?” she put her hands over her mouth and her eyes popped out.

“You don’t know?” she whispered then pulled me inside before closing the door after me.

“What? Know what?” I was really curious as to what she was talking about but Pam came down looking very beautiful.

“You look amazing, friend! You guys look good together can I take a picture? I can’t believe you broke up with such sexiness yazi.” She said then bit her bottom lip seductively.

Pam looked embarrassed and I walked up to her.

“You look beautiful.” I said and she smiled.

“Thank you. What do you have behind you?” she asked excitedly while clapping her hands.

“Well...” I said with a chuckle, “since you said you didn’t like flowers...” I gave her her ‘flowers’ and grinned like an idiot. Her smile faded as she took them and Anelisa broke into fits of laughter and I tried my best to not laugh along with her since she had those contagious laughters.

“Spinach?” Pam asked as she observed it with a disgusted look on her face.

“It’s the perfect substitute for flowers don’t you think?” Anelisa said and gave me a high five. “Goodness you’re a keeper!” she said and then I heard her say, “Oh crap, it’s the face. You are in for it.”

I turned to look at Pam and she had thrown the ‘flowers’ on the floor and she had this look in her eye.

“It is over

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Luxolo Xulu! You are so selfish!” then she stomped her foot and ran to her room. I was left there with a laughing Anelisa and a confused heart.

“Well your girlfriend is single. I don’t know how that works.”

As you can imagine I was bummed out to the max when I had my gift thrown on the floor and stepped on. Some people simply can’t appreciate a good sense of humour.

Anelisa cheered me up by telling me about how Pam is going to come around and I should expect her to pop up again, soon. So I left and at home mom was asleep and I joined her

with my cracked heart. Remember when I said that you may 'lose' someone but you know that you haven't actually lost them? Well as crazy as it may sound this was one of those times.

"That girl again?" mom said when she realised I was awake just staring at the ceiling.

"Yeah..." I replied without looking at her. "She broke up with me."

"Again?"

"Again." I said and sighed. "Mom can I ask you something?" she balanced herself on one arm and faced me.

"Of course. Anything." She replied.

"Does love always hurt?" she chuckled.

"Well I could hardly call what you had with that girl, love." She said seriously.

"Mama." I warned and she shrugged.

"Okay... love is beautiful when you're with the right person. It isn't always going to be roses and sunshine the whole way kodwa if it's real then I believe you can make it through anything." I looked at her as I contemplated whether I should ask her about dad or not and I thought that I should.

“Are you and dad going to work this through?” she sighed in defeat.

“Honestly? The fact that he isn’t here right now and the fact that I could have lost him forever hurts more than the fact that I’ll be free if we actually go through with it.”

My eyes lit up and I sat up straight.

“Wait – so you’re willing to work things out with uTata even though he did you wrong?” she nodded and smiled.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying. But... not right now, right now he just needs to stay away for a while.”

“Aren’t you afraid he’s going to go back to his mistress.” She laughed bitterly.

“She would love nothing more than to have him to herself forever, Luxolo. Kodwa even though your father was weak for a moment, I believe that he loves me, I keep telling myself that and I hope and pray to God that I’m right. Because - ” she stopped mid-sentence and shook her head.

“Why am I saying all this to you. That girl, Pam. If you were meant for each other and if you find it in your heart to forgive her then love, and love hard. I don’t want you to feel guilty about this, it’s not your fault. She’s the one who should feel guilty because you don’t deserve this. I love you.” I wrapped my

arms around her and we slept in that position until the next morning.

“She broke up with you?” Amanda asked and I nodded.

“Again.” I said and clicked my tongue. “I’m not even mad.” I added.

“Do you still love her?”

“You don’t stop loving someone overnight, dude. So yes, but there’s only so much crap one can take.”

“Uh – can I have her numbers? I want to invite her to the party myself. You guys can fix things there.” I shook my head.

“Nah fam do I even want to?” I asked and she nodded rapidly.

“You don’t stop loving someone overnight.” She said and kissed my cheek.

“Text me.” The she ran off to the stands.

We were playing a friendly match today and I was ready for anything. We ran a few times around the court just to warm up and we were ready to play.

Anelisa's POV

The way Pam reacted yesterday to her boyfriend's hilarious sense of humour was unnecessary but anticipated. It always is.

"Pam uxolo kaloku but you're the one that broke up with him – twice." I said as I rubbed her back while she cried her eyes out.

"I didn't mean to."

"You never do." I said more to myself than to her. "You can still fix things with him, dude he really loves you."

"But - "

"No. Didn't you say that you two were invited to some party?" she sniffed and asked, "yeah?" so I continued.

"Well you can go there and talk to him there. Maybe even buy him something, I don't know." She sat up and looked at me.

"Or I can do it today. I mean, he said he has some match and I want to support him. It's perfect. Masambe!" she shouted excitedly. I sighed and shook my head.

“No, Saturday. He was really hurt yesterday when you acted the way that you did so just give him time to cool down and miss you.”

“I wanted him to fight for me, babe. He didn’t.”

“How many times should the poor guy fight for you, Pam!” she made her eyes little and I knew shit was about to hit the fan.

“You think I don’t see what you’re doing?” she asked and jumped off the bed.

“You think I didn’t see you flirting with him yesterday?” I sighed.

“You know I’m like that. I always do that but has a guy ever left you for me? No. Exactly, so you’re just being unnecessary.”

“Please leave.” She asked and I got up immediately.

“Please don’t forget to take your pills.” I reminded her and she ignored me so I left.

“Wait...” she said and I turned back to look at her.

“Please don’t tell him.”

“Which one?” I asked and she kept quiet for a while.

“Both... both of them.”

I nodded and left.

Chapter 11: Phobia

Phobia.

“It’s okay that you guys lost.” Amanda said somberly as she rubbed my back. The team had lost and it was my fault because I couldn’t pay attention and they basically depended on Blessing and myself so I was torn apart.

“It isn’t fucking okay!” Blessing shouted and threw the ball on the floor causing it to bounce high up and then leaving it to fall wherever it chose. He walked out the changing rooms and the rest of the team followed behind him so Amanda and I were left.

“Are you okay?” she asked. I was about to tell her what a stupid question that was but shook my head instead and she assumed that I wasn’t.

“I’m sorry.” She said and hugged me. I was in a bad space at the time because of many, many things. My mind had been foggy for a while now and I had a throbbing headache. I opened my eyes and Amanda was right in front of me, her face was an inch away from mine and I just looked at her without saying a word.

“It wasn’t your fault.” She reassured me and her minty breath filled my nostrils.

“It was.” I said and smiled. “But thank you for making me feel better, or at least trying.” Then I got up and picked up my bag.

“Wait...” she said and I turned back.

“Yeah?”

“Uh – are you guys still coming to the party?”

“Ai andazi Amanda.”

“Please come. My brother is expecting you. You know how much he adores you.” She said with a smile and I sighed. “Oh and Pam agreed to come I texted her last night.” I rolled my eyes.

“Okay, whatever.” I replied and walked out.

.

Have you ever felt like everything is happening to you all at once? Like God just decided to place everything on you all at once like, “Ya! You shall feel my wrath.” Nje out of nowhere, and that’s how I felt at the moment. I was driving home with the radio and today the radio just decided to play that one “Dear No One” song. Like why? I switched it off and continued driving as I tried to block out all emotions that I might have been feeling at the moment.

“That smells delicious.” I commented as I walked inside the house and our maid was cooking. She smiled and thanked me.

“Uh – mama?” she looked at me. “Where is my mom?”

“Hayi sukhathazeka usalele.”

“Did she eat today?” She shook her head with a frown.

“Oko esela.” I sighed and frowned along with her.

An alcohol problem is really serious and I didn’t want to watch my mother deteriorate right in front of my eyes. This was it... I had had enough of this pain and suffering and I blamed it all on my father for leaving. I told him, I told him that if he walks out that door then things are going to fall apart and they are. Things seem to be falling apart in all aspects of all our lives. I think we’re cursed.

“Mama?” I said as I took a peek inside her room to see if she was awake and she was, crying with a picture in her hand. She quickly put it face down as soon as she saw me then wiped her tears.

“I brought you food.” I said and sat next to her with the food on my lap but she looked at it with disgust.

“You need to eat.” I pushed on and she sighed while staring at the food.

“I’m not hungry, Luxolo.”

“Well you’re going to eat.” I said confidently and she rolled her eyes and opened her mouth so I fed her until the last spoon. She looked like she was about to vomit any moment now but she sucked it up and swallowed it.

“Thank you.” I said with a weak smile and she coughed.

“Are you okay? Do you need medicine?” I asked in concern.

“I’m fine, X. Please leave I’ll call you when I need you.” I was unsure of whether I should leave or not but I got up after tucking her in and left.

The maid, who I had later learned to call Grace since she felt uneasy at me calling her Mama forced me to do my homework since I had been neglecting it for a while now.

To think that at the beginning of this year everything was alright, no one would have thought or imagined that things would turn out this way but life has no script where you know exactly when to expect the next blow or where your next punch will be coming from. I guess we just have to accept it.

Amanda's POV

I walked up and down my room contemplating whether I should call him or not. I couldn't stop thinking about earlier, I felt it. We had a moment but I don't know if he feels the same way or not. I huffed irritably and picked up my phone then dialled his number [Yes, I know it off by heart].

"Talk to me." He said as normal and I smiled at how familiar his voice was.

"Uh – hey." I said then cleared my throat. "How are you feeling?" I asked legitimately concerned.

"Like crap?" he answered and I sighed.

"How are you and Pam now?" I heard myself asking.

"Still broken apart." He replied simply.

“Uh – can I ask you something?”

“Sure.” There was flipping of pages on the other side of the line and I found myself asking, “Are you studying?”

“Yeah, my maid practically forced me to so here I am. Is that what you wanted to ask?” I chuckled a bit and took a big breath. “You sound awkward.” He added on and that just threw me off but didn’t stop me.

“DidYouFeelWhatIFeltEarlierOnInTheChangingRoomsWhenOurFacesWereCloseToEachOther?” I asked that so fast that I had to take a breather.

“Quite surprisingly I heard every single word.” He said with humour in his tone and I huffed once more.

“Luxolo this is serious.”

“What did you feel?”

“We – I -” I took a deep breath and continued. “We had a moment, X. I felt something.” I said and waited for a response but didn’t get it immediately. I was patient though – well simply because I was holding in my breath.

“Feelings...” he said and a smile involuntarily crept on my face.

“Uh – yeah.” I said with that same smile.

“I can’t believe I still have those for Pam.” He said and my face dropped.

“Are you kidding me!” I shouted and he remained silent.

“Luxolo, get a clue!” I found myself saying and hung up then switched my phone off.

You know, I think one of the worst feelings is finding out that you didn’t mean as much to someone as you thought you did

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and you just feel stupid, and because you looked desperate, about caring too much.

I was sick and tired of Luxolo at this point in my life. The last tear for this guy had dropped. It was time for action and I had the perfect plan.

Amanda’s POV

If there's one thing I know about myself it's that I'm a very straight forward person. That's why I roll with more guys than girls. So this was different for some reason – I've had a crush on Luxolo Xulu for a heck of a long time and I've always been there. I'm talking thick and thin, good and bad, flip freaking bad to worse but what do I get? 'I can't believe I still have those for Pam.'

I sighed sadly and switched my phone back on hoping to find texts from him but there were none. It's done. The plan is in place.

X's POV

"Amanda!" I shouted from the other side of the line only to realise that she hung up on me. Okay she must be really pissed because she never hangs up on me, this was a first and I was worried. Just as I was about to call her back my battery died so I

just left it and continued doing my work. Through all this I tried to keep up with my work but it was difficult with so much on my plate.

“Luxolo!” mom shouted from her room and I got up immediately to attend to her.

“Yes?”

“Do you know where my alcohol is?” she asked as she looked through her cupboards in frustration. I cleared my throat and gathered up the courage to face the worst.

“I – yes – I know.” She stopped looking and gave me that, ‘well?’ look.

“I had it thrown out. I asked uMam’ Grace to - ”

“You did what!” she shouted but I maintained my cool even when she walked towards me.

“Mama you need help. Please let me help you.”

“I don’t need help! I don’t need anyone’s help, okay!” she huffed and stared at me for the longest time ever. “In fact you know what? I’ll drive myself.” she said as she grabbed her keys and tried pushing past me but I held her hand as I forced her to look at me.

“Mama! You know very well that you can’t drive because you have a driving phobia!” I screamed as this whole thing was

getting to me and I realised that I don't deal well with pressure. Where is my father when I need him! I can't be going through this alone but I sucked it up.

"You don't get to tell me what to do! I am the mother, not you!"

"I'm doing what you asked me to do, Mama! I'm stepping up and becoming the man that my father can't be!" I grabbed the keys from her. "So allow me!"

.

"Enkosi, Ma Grace." She looked at me and smiled.

"I've never heard you speak Xhosa before." She said as she was dusting the TV.

"Haha language switching going on up in here! I've never heard you speak English before." She chuckled. I was rather surprised at how fluent she was.

"Just because I clean people's houses for a living doesn't make me any less of a person. And I am very educated I just – I don't have the funds." She cleared her throat and changed the subject. "You're welcome. That alcohol was becoming a problem. Your mother needs rehab."

I sighed.

“I’ll search up on that. I want to do all that I can to help her because I’ve never seen her so broken. It hurts.” She smiled sadly and continued with her work.

Blessing’s POV

“Are you fucking crazy, Amanda! I may be pissed off at X right now but that doesn’t give me the right to hurt him intentionally!” I shouted through the phone.

“I knew you were going to react like this, Blessing. But at least try to understand where I’m coming from plus we’re both getting what we want.” I huffed.

“Which is?”

“You get your friend back when that girl is out of the picture.”

Do you ever get into an argument with someone and find yourself unable to speak for a moment because you're just so blown away by how utterly wrong and ignorant the other person is being and you just can't understand how anyone could actually believe the things they're saying? Well that's how I felt at that very moment.

"Amanda – I may be a twisted asshole but even I can see how fucked up this is! I thought you were better than this and I promise you if Luxolo gets hurt to the point where he becomes like me you will regret it. I swear to God you'll pay!" I threatened and hung up.

I felt like a hypocrite at the moment but at least I was a good hypocrite so I didn't fucking care. Life, it changes you in all ways you can imagine possible and I believe I'm too young to be saying this but hey – it's life right? I took my shirt off and jumped into bed.

"Dear God, uh – it's been a while since we've spoken you know but it's all good. Is it actually or am I just saying that to make myself feel better? Okay wait, I'm talking to you now."

I sighed.

"I'm sorry for coming to you when I'm in trouble but I don't know what to do with my life right now – but that isn't why I'm calling. Uh – alright so my friend, his name is X. Wait – you

already know all this I don't know why I'm giving you the details but okay, I said okay a lot but okay. Anyway, I need you to protect him from all evil that's coming his way. I just – I feel that there's only so much a person can go through and no evil friend formed against him shall prosper. I ask that you protect his parents and that you save their marriage because divorce is difficult. Not only for the people going through it but for the children involved as well. In fact I think they're the ones affected the most because they begin to question whether it's our faults or – yeah. Thank you for listening, I'll be going to church soon. I promise. Amen.”

I looked over to the left side of my bed and got lost inside my mothers' captivating eyes. That was her favourite picture before she left but it's mine now. She was gone too soon but I just suck it up and carry on.

Chapter 12: Missions

Missions.

My life basically consisted of waking up next to my mother, ensuring that she eats all the time, ensuring that she stays away from alcohol and ensuring that she doesn't cry herself to sleep every night so yes, my life revolved around her at the moment.

"You do know that I hate you, right?" Blessing pointed out as I tried bribing him with some food at break. He snatched them from me. "Could've had the decency to buy me some alcohol or something you know." I breathed a sigh of relief and smiled.

"You need to take losing a bit less seriously. That was so unnecessary."

"Well what can I say. I hate losing. What was wrong with you anyway?"

"You know exactly what was wrong with me. Anyway let me go."

"I don't care where you're going but are you going to the party tomorrow." I laughed at how ironic that was.

"Amanda forced me dude I can't not go. Why?"

“The bitch!” he hissed through clenched teeth and looked at me. “I don’t know what to do. Just – don’t go.” I gave him a puzzled look.

“Why not? I mean we go every year it’s basically a tradition now I guess.”

“You are so fucking naïve. Haven’t you noticed the change in Amanda lately?” I shook my head in confusion.

“It’s the same person I’ve always known. Anyway I have to go.” As if on cue the bell rang and I groaned in frustration.

“Where were you going anyway?”

“To Lutho. Just to see how she’s going. I haven’t seen her in a while.”

I was driving out the school grounds with the radio on when Amanda jumped in front of the car forcing me to stop.

“Are you insane!” I shouted when she showed up by the window. “I could have driven you over! What if -” she laughed heartily.

“You’ll probably want to kill me soon but anyway can you please take me to the mall?”

“Sure. Hop in.”

She was singing along to the radio as I drove in silence.

“So...” I began.

“So what?” she asked.

“Are we just going to pretend nothing happened?”

“I do not know what you’re talking about.” She said simply and continued singing along so I let her be. It was going to be awkward anyway.

She dragged me around the mall and forced me to help her look for gifts and what-not.

“Wait – why buy a necklace for your brother? I mean it scream ‘girl’ though.”

“Nobody said we’re shopping for my brother sweetheart.” She replied then blew me an air kiss. I followed her.

“Who are they for?”

“Someone special.” She said simply as she was observing bikinis.

“Oh – well I have to go.”

“Okay. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Have you ever accidentally made eye contact with someone then tried to “unsee” them? Then you’re on that ‘my walk past you like I never knew you game too strong’ tip? Well that was me when I saw Pam. We made eye contact, I “unsaw” her and walked past like I never knew her.

Then I felt like crap.

Pam’s POV

My heartbeat stopped for half a second when we made eye contact and as I was about to smile and walk up to him he looked straight ahead like he never knew me then just – left. Okay I understand that we didn't exactly end off on the right foot but that doesn't mean we can't be civil with each other, right? Ugh! I knew that this was going to happen. I knew that I was going to hurt him but it seems I'm the one who's hurt this time around.

"Pam, right?" I looked up and Amanda was standing there with a beaming smile.

"Uh – yes. Yes that's me."

"Well you just missed X."

"Didn't exactly miss him but yeah I know."

"You didn't miss him?"

"Well, I did MISS him but I didn't miss him. If you get what I'm trying to say." She gave me a side look and nodded.

"Okay whatever. You still coming tomorrow?" she asked in a bubbly tone.

"Yes? Ugh is he going to be there."

“Oh yes he is. I ensured that he would be.” I sighed and looked at the entrance in the hope that maybe he was still in the mall lingering around and stealing glances at me but there was no such luck.

“Yeah – yeah I’ll come through.”

“Excellent!” she squealed and kissed my cheek. She lingered for a moment and I stood still as this was rather weird and uncomfortable for me. “See you tomorrow.” She whispered while looking me in the eye and walked away to the opposite direction and I just stood in that position not sure what to do with my life.

“I haven’t felt like that in a long time.” I thought and walked as I tried not to trip over my two left feet that I so suddenly possessed.

X’s POV

The day I had been forced to be excited about had finally come and I wasn't ready for the celebration. I removed my arm from my mom and walked up to my room.

I missed Pam so much that I ended up scrolling through our pictures together and stopped by the one she took when we were laughing. For a moment, no matter how brief, I was happy.

I locked my phone while on that picture and took a shower. I have a feeling this is going to be a really long day.

"Luxolo you made it!" Amanda shouted the second I stepped out the car.

"Were you waiting for me?" I asked and she replied by giving me a hug and I hugged her back. She still didn't let go.

"Uh – you're holding on a bit too long today." I pointed out and she let go of me.

“You always buy the best gifts.” She said and looked at the box I was holding. “Masambe.”

You know those kids parties that are so packed they actually turn into a turn up later? Well this was one of them. The hell it’s always been like that

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for as long as I’ve known her. Her brother’s parties are always on point.

The party was good, the mood was good, the music was good and me? Well I was gloomy. Everyone was inside at this point and I just chilled outside alone and got lost in my thoughts about her – Pam. Don’t look at me like that, I can’t help that I love her.

I thought about her fragrance, her smile and the way she sings. ‘You’re my no one.’ I smiled as I thought back to when she said that. I really love her.

“It’s usually the girl who sits alone at the party.” A voice said and Pam sat next to me with a smile. I looked straight ahead and chuckled slightly.

“This isn’t a fairy tale.” There was an awkward silence.

“Uh – nobody told me that this would be a pool party.”

“It always is.” I said simply. There was silence again and I looked at her. “Wait – that necklace looks familiar.” Looking in her eyes I continued. “Amanda bought it yesterday.” For ‘someone special.’

“I know! It came as such a shock!” she giggled then admired it.

Oh...

Amanda’s POV

“He saw the necklace, perfect.” I thought to myself and smiled in victory. I looked around in search of Blessing but I couldn’t spot him so I went out to the twisted couple.

“Hi, guys.” I said with a smile and pulled Pam. “Well everyone is about to come and swim cause the cake is cut and whatever. The real party is about to begin.” I said with a smile. “I just thought you’d like something to swim in.”

“How did you know!” Pam said in amusement.

“I didn’t tell you. Alright, let’s go.” I said as I pulled her leaving X alone.

I was still holding her hand on our way to my room and my palms were actually sweaty from the nerves but I didn’t want her to see that. I left the door half open and let go of her hand.

“Uh – there’s your costume.” I said as I pointed at it and she thanked me.

“The bathroom?” she said with a smile.

“Why not change here? Don’t you feel comfortable in front of me?” I asked and she clutched the clothes to her chest.

“Haha well I hardly know you, Amanda so that would just be awkward.” I stepped closer to her and sat on the bed. Whew – this is going to be awkward.

“Please sit next to me.” I asked and she did so. “Why are you so nervous? Sit.” She cleared her throat and did so.

“I – I just -”

“You’re bi.” I stated simply and smiled. Her eyes popped out and I laughed. “No need to be embarrassed.”

“But how did you know?” she asked with eyes still wide with shock.

“That you’re bisexual? Oh your friend told me.” She was about to throw a fit but I held her hand and looked her straight in the eye.

“Umhle. Your eyes are perfect.” That sounded so cheesy. She blushed and cleared her throat.

“Enkosi.”

I leaned forward and kissed her. At first she was uncertain but she gave in and we shared the most electrifying kiss. My body felt alive and I couldn’t take my lips off hers, nor did I want to. Her soft skin, her touch was intoxicating. I heard footsteps and I held her closer, soaking in the moment as much as I could.

“Wha -” X said and I smiled into Pam’s lips while she jumped up almost falling over in the process.

Mission fucking accomplished.

Chapter 13: Raining Glass

Raining Glass.

X's POV

My mind literally stopped working so I just stood there staring at a girl I once loved – oh my goodness I can't even get myself to say it. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against lesbians but I do have a problem when someone I love goes ahead and kisses another girl. It's twisted and – it hurts. It stings at that very spot you used to feel all the love. Tears involuntarily flowed down my face and the wetness of my cheeks brought me back to earth, that and the ringing of my phone in my pocket.

"Hello?" I answered and turned around as their sight disgusted me.

“Luxolo Xulu?” I wiped my tears and walked down the stairs.

“Yes?”

“Please make your way to the hospital immediately.” My heart stopped beating, again.

“Why?” I stuttered but she had hung up already. I ran to the car and sped off to the hospital.

Who is at the hospital? Why did they call me? Why won't they tell me what's wrong? Is my mother okay? Panic shot through me the minute I thought about my mother and I said a short prayer, something I hadn't done in a very long time. I parked outside the hospital and ran inside.

“Luxolo! Luxolo Xulu!” I shouted the minute I got in and talked to the receptionist. “I'm Luxolo Xulu. Why – why am I here? What happened?”

“Sir, please calm down.”

“Please don't...” I breathed. “Why am I here?”

“Your parents were involved in an accident. Both of them are-” I heard nothing after that as I sank down to the floor. My heartbeat was getting slower and slower by the minute. Someone came and helped up to the chairs then offered me something to drink.

“Thank you.” I muttered numbly but didn’t attempt to take it from them.

How much pain does a person have to go through? Why – why is everything happening all at once? I can’t do this by myself I just...

The person sat down beside me and placed the water on the floor.

“God works in mysterious ways. He gives and takes in his own time. He gives you people that you need in your life. Some make you and others simply -”

“Destroy you. They destroy you.” I replied without looking up.

“All you have to do is pray to God. He will never leave you in your time of trouble.” I was about to fight and ask him where his God was when my parents got into the accident. Where his God was when I... when I needed him but I remained silent. He got up and left without me seeing his face and I didn’t mind.

“Mr Xulu.” The doctor said and I stood up immediately.

“Yes. Yes that’s me.”

“Please follow me.” He said and I staggered behind him. We got there and I sat down opposite him as he flipped through pages and I felt agitated and frustrated every time he turned the page.

“Luxolo Xulu.” He gave me an eye and carried on reading.

“Were – are these people your parents?”

“No, hey.” I said sarcastically. I understood his question and shook my head. He gave me a pained look and closed his book.

“Please tell me what’s going on? I’ve watched enough movies to know not to fight if I want you to talk so please, don’t make me change my mind set.”

“I admire your courage. Most people would be a nervous wreck by now.” I sighed.

“I don’t care but could you just please...”

“Most definitely.”

Mom’s POV

[I'll take you back a bit] I had received a phone call from John a few minutes asking to see me and naturally I said yes because we had a lot to talk about.

“Father, I ask that you grant me the strength to forgive this man even though he’s caused me so much pain. I ask that you grant me the wisdom to deal with the situation accordingly and that you protect my son wherever he is. May your blood cover him and be with him throughout his life and be with him. I ask for your forgiveness for I have sinned before your eyes. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. [Psalm 51].”

I recited that scripture as I drove out the driveway, it was time I faced my fear head on. I hadn’t driven in a few years so I was a bit rusty but I had the faith that God was protecting me and his will should be done. You’re probably wondering how I went from alcoholic to praying woman overnight. Well God works in many ways, this time he worked through Grace. She fed me the Bible so much the previous night and this morning that I actually got out and decided to drive.

I finally got to our meeting place and I got out to find him standing up as soon as I got out. Who said a hurt woman needs to show everyone else that they're hurt? I was dressed in my best outfit and walked up to him confidently while everyone else was looking our way.

"Uh – hello." He stuttered. He looked stunned and I smiled as he pulled out the chair for me.

"You look beautiful." He pointed out.

"I know."

"Luxolo underestimated you. He said if I walked out that door..."

"I know exactly what he said, John. I know that you left knowing what could happen but I forgive you." I looked at him, burning him with my glare and he looked back at me looking rather flabbergasted.

"What?"

"You heard me. I was drunk, John but I meant everything else that I said. But – that doesn't change the fact that I love and forgive you. Not for you

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but for myself." I sighed and looked through the menu.

“You aren’t divorcing me?”

“God hates divorce.” I said simply and flipped the page and decided on what I was going to eat. He got up and gave me a bone crushing hug.

“I love you.” He whispered and I said it back.

We had a wonderful meal together just laughing. We were going to go for counselling because our marriage wasn’t exactly perfect but we were willing to work it out and nothing else mattered.

“You drove here?” he asked and I waved the keys.

“I’m a phenomenal woman, John. Don’t underestimate me.”

We got inside the car as we were going home, our home and I insisted on driving. Gospel music was softly playing as we drove in comfortable silence.

“Thulisile!” was the last thing I heard before lurching forward without warning. The seat belt bit into my chest and knocked the wind out of me. The sound of raining glass echoed in my ears as an airbag exploded in my face.

X's POV

“So there’s a chance they might not make it.” kept on ringing in my head after the doctor said that. My mind became foggy and I actually forgot how to breathe.

“Breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth.” I did so as I looked at him and he repeated it. “In through your nose, out through your mouth.” I kept on doing this until my breathing pattern was back to normal but that didn’t stop the wave of shock that rushed through me and I sat there with my head in my hands.

“I’m terribly sorry you have to go through this. Is there anyone that I can call?” I shook my head and cleared my throat.

“Can I see them?”

“I’m afraid not, go home and rest. Come back tomorrow when you’re refreshed.”

“No!” I growled. “I want to see my parents.”

“You can’t. They’re in surgery right now and I can’t say exactly when they’ll be done.” I looked at him and shook my head.

“If they’re in surgery and you’re a doctor then why on earth aren’t you in there?” he ignored and dismissed me so I sat there waiting for news. Something, anything, I stopped every nurse I saw and they all simply dismissed me so I sat down and waited.

“I’ve been calling you for hours! Where are you! Are you okay!” Blessing shouted and I waited for him to finish talking before informing him where I was. He arrived at the hospital with a few of the guys and they sat down next to me. I didn’t notice that I was shaking until someone pointed it out.

“They might not make it.” the minute I said that it sunk in. My parents, the only real people that I have in my life might not make it and if that happens what’s going to happen to me? I’m only 17. Nobody said anything and I guessed it was because

they didn't know what to say. I wouldn't either if someone else were in this situation.

"You guys don't have to spend all night here." I said as I looked at them and we all shared brief hugs with each of them comforting me some way or the other. Since they came with two cars Blessing stayed and they left. He cleared his throat and sat next to me.

"I know the pain of losing a parent."

"I could lose both, fam." I said while shaking my head and laughing in disbelief. "I could lose them both and I don't know what I'm going to do after that because... "

"You could always come live with me." I shook my head.

"They aren't going to die Blessing. They'll never leave me alone in this world. Never." Knowing better, he offered to buy me some food and coffee since it was clear that I'd be staying the night.

"Do you ever get the feeling that this life isn't yours? That you have no control? That everyone around you is living and you're

just breathing. Watching. Waiting. For what? For the minute a complete stranger walks out of that room only to tell you that, ‘We did the best that we could but we’re sorry to tell you that they didn’t make it.’?” I looked at Blessing as I said this as the pressure was taking its toll on me. I was crumbling down by the minute and I couldn’t seem to take it anymore.

His remained quiet and I shook my head once more when a doctor walked towards us and I jumped up. “Excuse me, Mr and Mrs Xulu. What – what’s happening with them? I’ve been here for hours they -” he cut me off and took a deep breath.

“Uh – would you like to sit down?” he asked and I looked at Blessing then back at him.

“No.” he nodded and continued.

“Your mother is suffering from TBI [Traumatic Brain Injury]. It’s a form of brain injury caused by sudden damage to the brain, depending on the source of the trauma. TBI’s can be either open or closed brain injuries.” My palms were sweaty and I kept glancing at Blessing who was now standing next to me.

“Ok... so my mother? What about her?”

“Your mother is suffering from closed head injuries: these injuries result from a blow to the head. For example when the head strikes the windshield or dashboard in a car accident, her

chest was cut by the seatbelt which made breathing difficult for her and-" Blessing was becoming agitated and I noticed.

"Okay! Fine we get this!" he shouted. "So what happens now? How is she?"

He took a deep breath and looked me straight in the eye. "I'm sorry to say this but your mother didn't make it. "

I felt lightheaded but held on to the fact that my father might still be alive. As if reading my mind Blessing tilted his head back and looked at the doctor.

"And his father? "

"The car directly hit your moth-"

"I don't fucking care which side it hit, okay! I just want to know if he's alive or not."

"The father is still alive he's just-" that's all I needed to hear before letting out a scream and running out of the hospital.

"She can't be dead. She can't be dead. She can't be dead." I kept repeating those words in my head and I could hear Blessing shouting my name from a distance but I kept on running. I was running away from all this pain, from all the misery that suddenly dawned on me. My vision was blurred and I didn't even bother trying to wipe them. Someone held my arm and pulled me back before I crossed the road.

“She isn’t dead!” I shouted like a crazy person as I felt like one and my eyes were looking all over. I was looking for her. “She can’t be dead.”

The piercing pain in my chest made it difficult for me to convince myself that this was just a nightmare. It’s hard to wake up from one when you aren’t even asleep.

Chapter 14: Grief

Grief.

Blessing's POV

The Worst Things to Say to Someone in Grief

1. At least she lived a long life, many people die young.
2. He is in a better place.
3. She brought this on herself.
4. There is a reason for everything.
5. Aren't you over him yet, he has been dead for awhile now.
6. You can have another child still.
7. She was such a good person God wanted her to

be with him.

8. I know how you feel.

9. She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go.

10. Be strong.

I had been searching for the right things to say to X ever since we got here. My father came to fetch us at the hospital since he simply refused to leave until he knew more about his father and what was going to happen to his mother.

“Oh you’re awake.” I said as I stood up to be by his side.

“I didn’t sleep.” He said with a coarse voice and I offered him some water but he declined. “I want to go home.” He muttered as he stood up and put on his shoes.

“Home to who?” I heard myself say but he ignored me. “I’m sorry. I meant to say you can stay here with

us, until your father gets better.”

“Blessing. I said that I want to go home. Now give me the car keys so I can bounce.” He retorted and I took them out of my pocket.

“At least let me drive you.” He said nothing so I walked out and he followed me.

“Where are you going?” my father said as he dropped the call he was on.

“Uh – X wants to go home so I was driving him.” My father shook his head rapidly and ordered us to sit down so we obliged.

“You aren’t going home, Luxolo. You can stay here until your father gets better.”

“I want to go home.” He said once more and this time his voice had some sort of finality to it. My father and I looked at each other and I shrugged.

“Luxolo man mntanam khawume.” He pleaded. “Just stay okwangoku, just for ixesha elincinci. I know your

father would want me to do this so, please.” X simply shook his head and got out of the house.

“Eish,” I muttered, “I’ll stay with him just to ensure uba uright neh?”

“I don’t like this

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Sibusiso. I don’t like it one bit.”

“But there’s nothing you – we can do about it tata so I’ll see you when I fetch the rest of my things later.

Sharp.” I said and followed Luxolo.

He was standing next to the car with his hands in his pockets and his head looking up at the sky. I

unlocked it and we entered.

“I’m sorry for your loss.” I said as I drove out the yard. He simply looked out the window ignoring me completely.

“I know that you’re trying to be strong for your father and all but we all need help at times like this, I’m

here for you.” He sighed loudly.

“Shut up Blessing. Just – just shut up.” He replied and I did exactly that.

“I’m going home now to fetch a few of my things then I’ll come back.”

“Don’t bother.” He replied and snatched the keys away from me. I contained my anger and laughed in disbelief. “What the hell am I supposed to home with!” I shouted but he slammed the door in my face and I heard the key turn from the other side.

X’s POV

I sank down to the floor after locking it and tried to breathe normally after reality hit me. And it hit me hard. I was supposed to come home to this woman today and now she's gone for good. I will never fucking see her again and that thought alone had me questioning whether life itself was worth it.

If a God truly does exist and loves just like the man from the hospital said he does then why the hell would he allow something like this to happen to me, to us, to my family. He knows that I have nobody other than the two people that were under this roof! What am I supposed to do with my life right now! Who am I going to have midnight chats with? I have no mother...

I slowly picked myself up from the floor and it felt like

I left everything at that door. The very same door that I told my father if he walks out of he'll be changing our lives forever and he did. I hate that man with every fibre of my being and I wanted him to know that the minute I was allowed into that hospital room. I wanted him to know just how much I despised him and how much I wish that he had died instead of my mother and how much – how much I wish that I never knew him.

I searched for the alcohol that Grace hid away from my mother because she didn't throw it out she just hid it. When I found it I went up to my room with all those bottles and locked myself in.

After that day my life consisted of two things, either drinking or drowning myself in my school work just to

stop myself from overthinking. My father was out of ICU and not once did I go to visit him. The only communication was through cell phone because what I did care about was my mother getting a proper funeral. Grace still lived with me and she tried her best to get me to open up but I felt comfortable in my misery and I didn't mind dying all alone. One thing she said really stuck with me though. She said: "Your mind is a powerful thing. When you fill it with positive thoughts, your life will start to change. That's what I want from you, Luxolo. I want you to change and be the man that you know you are. Your mother loved you and she'd want you to be happy. Not like – this. You're basically turning into an alcoholic at such a young age and I don't want that for you because I love you just like a mother. Don't forget that." She smiled sadly and kissed my forehead.

“I don’t know why you’re still trying to push me away because I’ve been here and andiyi ndawyo.” Blessing said after I tried ignoring him at school, again. “In fact I should be the one to ignore you ngoba you closed the door in my face that other day.” I shook my head with a slight, humourless laugh.

“You were beginning to annoy me with your endless bickering.”

“My father is worried about you.”

“He shouldn’t be. I’m a big boy and I can take care of myself.” I said matter-of-factly and he cleared his throat.

“What happened Saturday? At the birthday thing?”

“Ao Nkosi I’ve spent my days trying to forget that.”

“So she went through with it.” he said more to himself than to me.

“Wait – you knew?” I asked with confusion etched on

my face.

“Yes but I warned kodwa she doesn’t listen neh?

Uzonya uAmanda. She clearly doesn’t know me. U-zo-kun-ya uAmanda!” He then clicked his tongue and rushed off.

Chapter 15: Ready or Not

Ready or Not.

“You’re drinking again.” Grace said as I took another swig of the alcohol I had now taught myself to not live without.

“That’s exactly what I said to my mother.” I let out a humourless chuckle and put the bottle on the tip of my mouth before turning to look at her. “Stop lecturing me about my life and what I want to do. Please.” She snatched the bottle from me and held my face with her free hand, forcing me to look at her.

“I love you and I care for you, I will not be disrespected by you because of anything – be it I’m lower than you or because you’re going through a rough patch in life. I’m trying to be here for you and you will take that attitude of yours and shove it because I will not accept it! Siyevana?” I laughed in her face and brushed her hand away.

“Mxm.” Was the last thing I said before stumbling up the stairs since the alcohol had taken its toll on my thinking.

I was lying on my bed facing upwards as I thought about my life and all the people that I want to hurt in every way possible. Pam being the first one on that list, I needed to hurt that girl. I

needed to shatter that girl in such a way that she'll regret even looking my way and playing me for a fool.

There was a knock on the door disturbing me from my thoughts. I got up to open and Grace was standing there with a small smile on her face.

"Someone is here to see you. And put on your shirt ngoba it's a girl."

"Which – which girl?" I asked in confusion and shook my head rapidly as if it would stop the fuzziness.

"I didn't ask." She replied simply and turned around.

I followed shortly after I locked my room and slid the key in my back pocket.

"Pam?" I said in disgust and she wiped away her tears.

"Uh – I'll leave you two." Grace said after noticing the tension. We stood there staring at each other and her tears didn't move me at all.

“What do you want here?” I asked with the same look of disgust etched on my face and she seemed to be lost in thought. It took me a while to realise that she was staring at my ripped body – a thought came in mind and I smiled for a brief moment.

“I’ve been contemplating for weeks on end whether I should come here or not and – and I decided to come.”

“That’s what you’ve been practicing in the mirror for the past weeks?” I said with a raised eyebrow and she sighed out loud.

“I am so sorry Luxolo. I am so very sorry I don’t know what – what I’m going to do if you don’t forgive me.”

“It’s 21:00 at night and you come to my house to tell me this crap?” I asked and sat down thinking of how I was going to go about this ‘plan’. I know it’s something that Blessing would do but I’ve never done it before.

She stood there awkwardly with tears streaming down her face and I rolled my eyes.

“Come.” I offered and she stopped breathing for a while. I patted the empty seat beside me and she walked there feeling unsure. “What? Does my half nakedness offend you.” She swallowed hard and tried to look away but I held her head to face me.

“I loved you

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Pam. I fucking loved you and you shoved that loved down Amanda's throat. With your tongue, see how twisted that sounds? That's how sick I feel when I think about you and everything that you are. Right now, I want you to leave but I have so much to tell you and talk about that I can't let you." She opened her mouth to speak but looked away and I forced her to look at me again – more forcefully this time.

"I'm sorry Luxolo." She said with a cracked voice and I let go of her.

I took a deep breath and my heart beat faster as I thought of what I was about to do. "Do you want to get drunk with me?" I asked through clenched teeth just thinking about inviting her or even touching her.

She nodded sheepishly and apologised once more.

"I hate you, nothing is going to change that but I want someone to get drunk with. Are you game or not?"

"I – I am." I nodded once and grabbed her hand as we both marched up the stairs.

Pam's POV

My mind was feeling fuzzy and we were making small talk. I didn't understand what he was doing because not so long ago he told me that he hates me.

"Want another bottle?" I was hesitant because this alcohol was getting to my head now.

"Sure." I drank it without taking a break and realised he was looking at me when I was done.

"Uh – is this your room?" I asked and he shook his head. "I figured because it's kind of empty for someone that lives here permanently." He laughed.

"You are so stupid." He pointed out and stood up from the floor to stand in front of me. His ripped body I couldn't help but stare at and I looked away feeling embarrassed.

He hovered over me and planted a baby kiss on my lips. I was caught off guard but I ended up responding. I was in a total daze and all I cared about was how good it felt kissing X.

“I – Love – You.” I panted through the hard kissing and touching. He ignored me and slipped off my shirt then my bra. He planted soft kisses on my jawline and he moved to my throat, down to my collarbone then kissed my breasts. He touched my body so gently as he went down to my belly and I closed my eyes and tried not to think about what I was about to do.

He unbuttoned my jeans and pulled them off along with my underwear and took his pants off too. I looked away and cleared my throat. It’s a good thing I was tipsy otherwise I would not be naked in front of the guy that used to love me right now.

He comes up again and kisses me before whispering in my ear. “I don’t have protection.” At that moment I didn’t care as I responded by digging my nails in his soft shoulders and thrust my tongue into his mouth.

Finally he’s inside me and I jump from the pain. He kisses me to stop me from screaming and moves slowly at first. The searing pain is too much to handle and tears roll down my face and I tell myself that he’s worth it.

After a while we're done and I stare at the roof. "I love you." I whisper with tears still rolling down my face and he laughs heartily. There's blood on the sheets and I jump up but I'm in pain.

"So you were a virgin?" he asks and I nod.

"I lost it to you because I love you." I whisper again.

"Well I don't love you. In fact I despise you so clean yourself up and you'll leave in the morning." He said as he slipped on his underwear and jeans. My tongue got stuck in my throat and I tried talking but nothing came out.

"What? What do you want to say?"

"Why did you do this to me?" I suddenly felt insecure about my body so I grabbed the sheet and covered myself.

"A tooth for a tooth. You didn't think I'd let you get away with shattering my heart right?"

He spewed before walking out.

Chapter 16: Vivid

Vivid.

Blessing's POV

“You look like hell.” I pointed out when I opened the front door to find Pam standing there.

“You have to help him, Blessing, he’s a mess and – and he’s turning into you.” She pleaded then turned around and left.

I immediately grabbed my keys and drove to his house.

“Beep. Beep. Beep. I never thought I’d hate the beeping sound of a car like I do now. It was that same beeping sound that took my mother away from me. ‘I’m sorry Mr Xulu but your mother

didn't make it.' That sentence is repeated over and over in my head, each day. Why are they doctors if they couldn't help my mother? They probably killed her, trying to operate her. They knew that it was risky but they carried on with it as they dangled false hope in front of me.

I can still smell her, I can still hear her laugh and I can still hear her telling me to wake up. I can still see her big beautiful eyes. That's the worst part of losing someone, the memories you have of them. I just want to have her back. I've gotten to the point where I drink like her

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hoping that I will feel like her, hoping to feel like her presence is here. But it just never works. I lost my mother. I lost myself." Luxolo said as he was on the floor with a bottle of whiskey in his hand.

"Do you know what it feels like to lose someone that you love Blessing? Let me tell you how it feels. It feels like a part of life has just been taken away from you. Ripped out from the very core and you don't fight for it because you just have no more fight left in you. You don't have the strength to face that part of life without them so you allow them to leave your life. You don't even mourn immediately because you're still holding on to that tiny glimpse of hope – the one that tells they're going to come back. That they're just in a deep sleep but you believe

they're going to come back." For the first time since I got here he looked up at me with eyes full of tears and took a huge gulf of the alcohol. "My mom is going to come back Blessing." He stated and wiped away his tears angrily.

For once in my life I was speechless. I literally went mind blank so I just joined him on the floor and took a swig of the alcohol as well.

"I know exactly how it feels." I muttered. "I also don't have a mother, remember?" I said and handed the bottle back to him. "But sometimes you just have to learn to let shit go, homie." I stated simply and took the bottle away from him after he drank and closed it then placed it besides me.

"Pam came to see me." His facial expression changed and I carried on. "She told me that you're a mess. And that you're turning into me. What did she mean by that?" I asked looking straight at him and he burped.

"I fucked her then told her I despised her." I closed my eyes and opened them to ensure that I wasn't hearing things.

"You did what?"

"I broke her virginity then told her I hated her." He burped once more and tried getting up but I punched him and held him by the collar.

“What the fuck Luxolo!” I shouted and pushed him away as I got up.

“It’s something you would do. Ouch...” he said and touched the side of his face that I punched.

“This is exactly what I didn’t want to happen! I don’t want you to be me, X! You’re too good for this!”

“You’re making a noise. Please shut up.” He said and tried getting up again.

I helped him up to his room and he surprisingly let me in.

“Hold’up.” I said as I raised my hand and he jumped onto his bed. “You have a fucking teddy bear? A huge ass teddy bear? A 17 year old and you have a fucking teddy bear!” I shouted and he nodded to everything and cuddled it.

“Yes. Do you have a problem with that?” he asked and I nodded rapidly.

“Yes I have a problem with a 17 year old sleeping with a teddy bear!” he just said “Mxm” and went to take a shower.

I stood in the middle of the room and admired how legit it was. This was the first I’d seen it since we’ve been friends and I was still amazed as to why he’d allow me to come in.

I stared at his wall of awards with ribbons, certificates and statues. His and my room were basically the same thing except

that I had more awards than he did. Which is something that always amazes me since he's the studying and focused friend while I'm the YOLO one.

I waited for him by reading the certificates, paging through his books and looking at myself in the built in mirror.

Luxolo Xulu had a huge, white teddy bear on his bed and I wrecked my brains trying to figure out why he would do that.

"I'm hypnophobic." He said and I twisted my face not understanding what that meant and sat down. He sighed and pulled his bear closer to himself. "In other words I can't sleep unless I have something to hold on to. I have nightmares. Vivid nightmares and they eat me alive if I don't have this beside me." he lifted the bear up to show that he was talking about it. "It differentiates what's real from what's a dream." He ended off by saying and I stared at him in amazement at this new piece of information.

"Why – why do you have nightmares?" I asked and he shook his head.

"My life is more fucked up than you think."

That one statement made me realise that I have no idea who Luxolo Xulu is. I have absolutely no clue and for some reason that terrifies me.

Chapter 17: Hotline

Hotline.

Blessing's POV

I was sitting on my bed trying to remember every little detail that I could about Luxolo. Why would he have such nightmares and it hit me that he never talks about his past. Ever.

I stood up and paced around the room. Nightmares? Could he have killed someone or at least experienced something tragic? What – what the hell could give someone such vivid nightmares? It has to be something tragic and I'm going to find out what it is.

X's POV

“I can’t believe I just told Blessing that.” I thought to myself and splashed my face with water. “He’ll be asking questions and all. Wait – you’re talking to yourself now? Wow.” I said out loud and wiped my face with my towel then walked over to the room Pam lost her virginity in. Everything was exactly the way that it was before and I looked away as I remembered what I did.

“You were drunk and you were acting under the influence of alcohol.” I thought out loud and took the sheets off the bed to go burn them.

“Uyaphi nezonto?” Grace asked as I stepped down the last step.

“It’s none of your business.” I found myself saying and grabbed the keys then walked out. I threw the sheets in the back and drove off to go and burn them somewhere no one would find them. Hehe one would think I just disposed of a body but it’s all the same to me since I took something that can never be returned.

I breathed out and rested my head on the steering wheel. When did I become so twisted? I'm turning into the person I told myself that I'd never be and I don't like it. I don't like it at all. My phone rang and I answered without checking.

"Talk to me."

"Uh – at least one thing hasn't changed." Pam's voice rang in my ear and I closed my eyes as guilt enfolded me. I kept quiet because I didn't know what to say to her.

"I just wanted to tell you that I forgive you."

"Okay." I replied and hung up. I can't do this to myself, I really can't.

Pam's POV

Silence. Nothingness was what I heard after I told X that I forgive him for what he did to me. Tears rolled down my face involuntarily and I grabbed my happy pills with shaking hands.

“It’ll make the pain go away.” I convinced myself and downed four at the same time. It took the edge off and I wiped my tears off with a smile. “Just – just think happy thoughts.”

I walked to Anelisa’s house and jumped up and down in excitement when I saw her.

“Babe!” I screeched and hugged her. She hugged me back hesitantly and I understood why.

“Look. I’m sorry for what I said to you the other day, it was uncalled for and simply wrong.”

“Oh...” was the only response that I gave and I smiled in disappointment. “You’re happy today. X treating you well?” she asked as she stepped aside. We sat on the couch and I cried silently.

“Haibo

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Pam. What’s wrong with you?” she asked and rubbed my back. I cried even more and she hugged me.

“He – we – his house -” I mumbled but I couldn’t even put a whole sentence together. My chest clammed up and I stood up for some air then laughed out loud.

“Pamela...” she pleaded and I looked at her with a grin on my face.

“You know what they say about your first.” Her eyes grew larger and her jaw dropped.

“What!” she shouted and I smiled with tears in my eyes.

“Then he told me that he hated me – I can’t understand how anyone can be so evil because I apologised, Lisa. I don’t deserve this.” She got up to come and hug me and I cried in her embrace until I felt better.

“I told him that I forgive him.”

“Did you mean it?” I shook my head.

“No. How do you forgive someone that never asked for it and quite frankly doesn’t deserve it?” she frowned and I asked her to walk me home.

X's POV

I thought about what Pam said earlier but shoved her memory to the back of my head but that was short lived when a text from her came through.

COULD YOU PLEASE TALK TO ME? The text read and I thought why not.

.

SURE.

.

I MISS YOU, LUXOLO. WHAT YOU DID TO ME CAN BE FORGIVEN AND WE CAN TRY AGAIN.

.

I'M SORRY BUT I'M DONE WITH YOU.

.

IF YOU DON'T TAKE ME BACK I'M KILLING MYSELF!!!

My heart beat slower and I looked at the message for a long time. Is she serious?

.

0112344837 [actual number] THAT'S THE SUICIDE HOT LINE.
YOU NEED HELP.

I blocked her immediately then switched off my phone.

Chapter 18: Forever

Forever.

Suicide? Because of me? I brushed the thought off and went to take a shower just to think about what I was going to do now. I stepped inside the shower and thought.

"Okay. Okay Luxolo your life is a mess. You know this right? Of course you do you're living it. Alright this is what you're going to do - drink your emotions away and think positive thoughts. Ugh I just want the funeral to pass already because I don't want to think about my loss anymore. When I said I don't have any fight in me I meant it. My father is out of the ICU and you haven't even visited him. Because you don't care but you know that you do. Mxm." I switched off the water and stepped out to notice my phone ringing on my bed.

"Talk to me."

"Luxolo." the familiar voice ringed in my head and I took a second before answering.

"John." he sighed and cleared his throat.

"I need to talk to you. Please come see me today?" he asked and I nodded mentally. "Hello?"

"Oh uxolo. I'll be there." he said thank you and hung up.

"You look like crap." I said more to myself than to him and I entered the hospital room he had been in for a while now. I walked over to the side of his bed and placed the keys on his bed.

"Enkosi for coming." I slumped on the chair and tried my best to not look at him in the eye.

"Why am I here again?"

"Haibo Luxolo I'm your father and I missed you."

"You're my dad. A father doesn't walk out on the woman that he claims to love after cheating on her with another woman and then expect to be labelled as a father. Correct yourself." I stated and he kept quiet for a while seemingly taken aback by my lash out. I raised my eyebrow and looked at him. "So let's cut the bull emotions. Why am I here?"

He closed his eyes as a way of trying to contain his anger and breathed out loudly.

"You. Are. Being. Completely. Disrespectful." he growled and I looked at him with a smirk.

"What did you expect? I told you. I told you to stay but did you? No." I chuckled in disbelief and got up. "Please call me when you actually have something constructive to tell me." I grabbed the keys then stormed out. The minute I stepped out I let out a deep, relieving breath that I didn't know I was holding in. Tears swam around in my eyes and I wiped them away angrily.

The next few weeks were rather difficult as we were preparing for the funeral, my dad was home and hating him was a full time job in itself, Pam was alive and Blessing was slowly becoming distant and I didn't understand why because I needed him now more than ever.

The funeral was finally here and I stood in front of the mirror while fixing my tie.

"She's really gone." I thought and clutched at my chest as the pain seemed to resurface all over again. There was a knock on my door and I went to open. Dad stood there with his crutches and smiled faintly.

“Are you ready?” he asked as he observed the room then focused on me again. I nodded and closed the door in his face so I could finish and have a little time to myself.

Losing someone you love forever is one thing that cuts deep into your soul leaving you empty and shattered. So you try and find something that will replace that empty spot and when you can't find it? You bury yourself in the emotions that you first felt when you heard they were gone. You find comfort in your wet pillow and your agonizingly painful heart at 03:00 in the morning. You find that nothing compares to not having someone that says “I love you” to you every night and meaning it. You – you lose yourself and the worst part of losing yourself is getting lost and having nobody to find you. At least if you had someone to hold your hand throughout the whole thing and they find you through all the barriers that you keep on building up to protect your bleedingheart from anyone and anything that might want to hurt you again.

But sometimes you just get used to pain. Like it's your ‘happy place’, ironic isn't it? And making someone else feel that pain makes it so much better, to know that someone out there feels

the same way and their hearts are bleeding the same.
Especially if they've done you wrong before – it's satisfying.
Twisted but satisfying.

I wished I hadn't gone to the funeral

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so much so that I didn't even speak. I was poker faced throughout the whole ceremony with dark shades on and tears bit back every time they tried escaping.

The worst part was when they lowered her body and covered it, forever. I lurched forward bleeding attempt to throw myself inside with her but I was held back by some men and I cried. For once today I cried my heart out not caring what anyone said or thought about me at the moment. Blessing took me and we went to sit in his car when he offered me water but I smashed it on the road and kicked it away.

"She's gone, Blessing! I – I will never see my mother again!" I exclaimed and he hugged me in response.

“This is the part where I lay you to rest forever, mama.” I went to my mother’s grave at 00:00 and kneeled in front of her grave. I poured out my heart to her and I wasn’t scared of being amongst dead people. I finished off by saying, “I’m sorry for the person that I’ve become. I know how disappointed you’d be in me right now and I’ll change. I’ll – I’ll forgive and try to love again. I’ll try.”

Then I got up. As I was walking to the gate I saw a figure, it looked like a male and he was well built. The second he saw me approaching he got in his car, which was directly behind me and drove off.

I shook my head in confusion and made a mental note to go and see Pam first thing in the morning .

Chapter 19: I Love You to Death

I Love You to Death.

The door creaked open and I cringed as I wanted to be as silent as possible when I entered her room. Pam's parents weren't as bad as she made them out to be because they allowed me to go up since she didn't want to talk to anyone and they didn't know what to do.

"I'm not hungry." She mumbled weakly and I sat on the bed silently.

"I - its me." I stuttered and she turned to look at me. Her eyes were red and puffy and they were hardly open. The sight sent daggers straight to my heart because I knew that it was because of me that she was like that.

"I'm sorry

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Pam. I am so sorry. You don't deserve this." She frowned and closed her eyes.

"I haven't eaten in days and I look like crap..." She closed her eyes as she swallowed painfully and looked at me again.

"Every time I go outside it feels like the sun is too bright. Is this what I get for loving someone - you - but trying to let them go?" She asked and words got stuck in my throat as they her words hit home.

I opened my mouth to speak but closed it again since my heart was beating a thousand times faster.

"I'm sorry." I breathed as I held back tears and she got up to give me hug allowing me to freely cry into her neck and hold her close. The hug caught me off guard and I held on for dear life.

"I'm sorry." I kept on repeating as if that would make everything okay.

"Its okay." She said weakly. "I forgive you. I think I always will but you have to go. Just because I forgive you doesn't make it better. It doesn't make the pain go away." She said with a cracking voice and I squeezed her wanting to feel closer than ever. Her grip on me loosened but mine didn't.

"Before I go... I want you know one thing."

She said and I was confused as to what she meant.

"What's that?" I asked in fear and she let go and held my face gently on both sides like I would do before I kissed her.

"I love you to death." She planted a foamy kiss on my lips and her head dangled on her shoulders as foam kept bubbling out of her mouth.

Chapter 20: Overdose

Overdose.

I was beginning to get a real phobia for hospitals. I don't even know if such exists but lately they terrified me. I'm here, again, in less than a month for yet another important person and I can feel my skin crawling at the possibility that she might not make it.

I don't know if she will or not but I learnt that false hope will get me nowhere. It drove it insane the last time, I'm not putting myself through that again. Ever. Pam's father had driven her to the hospital and I drove behind him because I was afraid I wouldn't be a safe driver at the time. Rather I die alone than with her. But that's ironic as well because I'm the reason she did this.

Damnit I should have taken her seriously when she said she's going to kill herself !

Suicide? I shook my head trying to shake off the thought. Like repeatedly shaking my head vertically would remove the bitter thought and memory permanently engraved in my brain. The way foam kept bubbling out her mouth and the way her head was dangling from my arms.

Her father had driven her to the hospital as soon as he heard my agonizing scream coming from the room. Instead of driving behind him to the hospital I drove home instead and locked my room as soon as I got there.

Pam's POV

I knew the risks of taking an overdose but the love I held for

Luxolo was too deep and him not loving me back cut deeper. "One, two, three, four, five..." I counted the pills until I got to a number I saw fit to kill me. I tilted my head back and sniffed back the tears that were forcing themselves out so I eventually let them be and took a bottle of alcohol that I stole from my father's room and placed it next to the pills.

"This is it." I told myself and popped one into my mouth followed by a swig of the alcohol. I did this until they were done then dropped the bottle to the floor as I felt life being sucked away from me. Slowly...

Have you ever loved someone so much that it physically hurt? The thought of them not loving you back tearing your heart into half and all that love turning into bitterness? So much so that you feel death is the only way out from all these emotions that engulf in you in them? I was neck deep when I gave up

on Luxolo, on love, on life.

Which is why I cursed in my head the moment I realised that I was in hospital, I could vaguely hear soft sobs and voices in the room that I was in. My eyes were heavy and throat felt rusty, I didn't even try to move.

“Depressant drugs such as tranquilizers, antianxiety drugs and sleeping pills cause sleepiness, slowed or slurred speech, difficulty walking or standing, blurred vision, impaired ability to think and mood changes.” The person that was speaking stopped for a while and sighed heavily when I heard my father shouting at him to carry on.

“Overdose symptoms can include slowed breathing, very low blood pressure

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stupor, coma, shock or... or even death.”

There was complete silence in the room I even found myself not breathing for a second. My mom let out a scream that probably echoed throughout the whole hospital.

“But our patient is lucky because she was found immediately so the pills are pumped out of her body, since she overdosed with alcohol there are possible complications.”

“Complications? What sort of complications?” my father asked with a defeated tone.

“We need to do some more tests before we can confirm. Please come see me in my office after your visit with her, she needs to rest.” He said and I heard the door close.

I opened my eyes only to find my mother burning me with her gaze and I wished I had kept them closed. My father was holding my hand and kissed my forehead.

“Why did you do it?” she asked and I tried sitting up but failed so I remained in the same position and said nothing.

“Please answer me because I don’t understand, I thought we gave you everything that you needed. Please...” she pleaded and I looked at my dad, begging him with my eyes to make her stop.

“Now isn’t the time, baby. Just let her be we’ll talk to her

when she's alright." Mom glanced at me one more time before crying all over again and walking out the room without looking back.

"Wa-water." I breathed with great difficulty and he helped me sit up then gave me the water as he helped me drink it.

My father left shortly afterwards and I went back to sleep.

I spent a few days at the hospital and I was slowly but surely recovering. I could speak without feeling any pain now but my speech was slurred, which scared me because it wasn't getting any better.

The door opened slowly and I looked up from the novel I was reading to meet Luxolo's cruel eyes. I gasped a bit since I wasn't expecting him and because I never thought I'd see him again.

"Hello." He said awkwardly and I put my book down.

“Hi.” He came closer and the more steps he took closer to me the harder my heart kept beating.

“How are you?” he asked and I rolled my eyes at how stupid that question was.

“I’m fine. You?”

“I’m falling apart.” He confessed and sat on the chair next to the bed.

“So what do you want me to do?”

“I want you to explain to me why you did what you did.”

“You.. know exactly why.. I did what I did...” I said with my slurred speech and cleared my throat in embarrassment.

“Because of me?”

“Yes.” I said frankly. “What... what you did to me.. that day is cruel... is unforgettable.” I said in honesty and he dropped his head into his hands.

“I am so...”

“Don’t tell me... you’re sorry!” I shouted and he looked at me.

“This was your scream for help?” he asked. “Because it’s

hardly a cry.” He added on.

“No... I wanted to die... I want to die.”

“Don’t say that.”

“It’s true.”

“What if – what if we got back together?” he asked and I looked at him with confusion etched on my face.

“What?” I breathed and huffed in amazement.

“I love you. I love what we had.”

“I love you too, X but ... this love is killing me... literally.”

There was silence in the room and he got up and gave me an innocent peck on the lips then hovered over me without saying a word. Our eyes were locked and neither of us wanted to look away.

The chemistry between us was there and it was strong. His head dipped again but this time the intention wasn’t so innocent, I allowed him by not looking away and meeting him halfway.

In that moment, when our lips touched, my world changed, I

forgot about all the things that had happened between us and all the bitterness sort of turned into sweetness as I tasted him, and him me. It was like a dream, one that you have a thousand times before and the huge wave of euphoria that engulfs you the moment you experience it.

Touch it.

Taste it.

My hands rested on his chest and he pulled me closer, held me tighter and our lips moved in perfect sync, our minds branding the feeling into our souls.

A tear dropped from his eye the same time one dropped from mine.

This was it, the last kiss had been shared.

The last tear had dropped.

A love was lost.

Chapter 21: Warning

Warning.

That kiss held so much meaning I couldn't help but linger on her lips a bit before standing up straight. We both wiped our tears at the same time and I walked away without looking back.

As I opened the door she stopped me and said, "Love does exist, Luxolo. We just didn't know how to." And with that I left.

By the time I left the hospital it was getting dark out and that same figure that I saw the day I went to visit my mom's grave was there, again. I closed my eyes for a few seconds and told myself that it was simply a figment of my imagination. When I opened them again the figure was gone.

"You're going crazy." I told myself and drove home.

The following day I didn't bother going to school, I just went to the hospital with chocolates and hope. Hope for what? I didn't know either.

The way to her room was now familiar to me so I didn't need anyone to help me get there. Or maybe I did – her bed was neatly made and the room was empty. I closed my eyes for a few seconds hoping that this time someone would appear instead of disappear. Nothing happened. Just as I was about to walk out and ask around a young nurse with a sad smile walked in and asked me to sit down on the chair provided. I obliged.

"I'm sorry, sir but her father said we should transfer her to another hospital. If I'm not mistaken they're moving." I laughed as she brushed my right shoulder. I pushed it away and she cleared her throat in embarrassment.

"Haha yeah, you probably are." She remained serious and I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. "Are you sure we're talking about the same person?" I asked calmly.

"Yes, sir, Pam? She left yesterday. Are you Luxolo?"

"Yes." I replied with a clenched jaw.

"She left you a letter." Only then did I realise that she was holding a piece of paper. She gave it to me and I unfolded it slowly. Luxolo was written carefully on top of the page.

It read as follows:

“By the time you receive this I’ll be gone. (That line carries so much irony it’s not even funny.) I decided to leave because that place reminds me of all the things I’ve been through. I’m sorry for the pain you’ve felt because of me and every tear that you’ve shed because of me. I thought you were going to be the one who was going to make me wonder why I was afraid to love. I thought you were the one who was going to prove that love really exists. I was fantasizing about the future and you were in it, but I guess what spoils things the most is the picture in our head of how it’s supposed to be. You are an amazing guy, Luxolo Xulu. You’re the kind of guy every girl dreams to be with and hey, I was just lucky to be your first. Your first everything. I pray that God gives you the strength to pull through everything you’re going through, I pray that you find someone who’s going to love you with their all, someone who’s going to love you until it hurts and I hope you love them back with that same intensity. I might come back but not anytime soon, I need time to heal. Time to find myself learn to forgive and forget. I don’t want your memory to leave a bitter taste in my mouth. I don’t want to hate you. And this is not me trying to make you feel guilty but ever since you broke my virginity I don’t know my worth anymore. It feels like everyone knows what I’ve been through. I feel dirty, inside and out and everyone is looking at me through judgmental eyes. So I keep my head down and kick rocks. “What if Luxolo was the one?” I keep asking myself. I’ve

become so damaged that I push everyone away. I'm afraid to open up, to show any kind of affection to anyone and that's why I'm leaving. And I don't want you to think that I'm leaving because of you, there's this overwhelming phobia that I've developed after having my heart broken a few times.

I still love you

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X. I always will. Take care of yourself for me. I'll do the same for you. <3"

She sealed it with a kiss at the bottom and I smelt it, it smelt familiar. Like the strawberry lipstick she always uses. I folded the letter back to its original form and walked out of that hospital feeling numb.

I bought a packet of cigarettes on my way home, apparently they help. Well I don't know if they do, I bought them along with a packet of mints and a lighter. Since Pam was my addiction I needed something else and this was it.

“You smoke now?” Blessing pointed out on the Saturday we decided to chill together. I lit my cigarette and said “Yep.”

He shook his head in disappointment and joined me. His phone rang and he walked away to answer it.

“Some girls want to join us. You game?” he asked when he returned.

“For whatever.” I replied and took a long drag of my cigarette before he took it and smoked up the rest of it. I popped the mint flavoured gum into my mouth and went through my news feed not really paying attention to anything.

The girls finally arrived and they were with the rest of the crew. Alcohol and girls, deadly combination but I loved it.

There was this one girl, she looked innocent and uncomfortable, like she was forced to come here. Just as I was about to approach her Blessing handed me a glass of alcohol and I downed it.

I had had enough for the night so I went out to the balcony to find that girl standing there. She was speaking on the phone and she sounded panicky. When she hung up she found me looking at her and I could literally see her stop breathing.

“Hiii...” I said awkwardly.

“Hi.” She replied tightly and tried walking past me but I grabbed her arm and she looked at me with those innocent eyes of hers. I smiled.

I let go of her arm and she stood there uncomfortably under my gaze.

“Are you okay?” I asked and she nodded.

“You look... agitated.” I pointed out and she looked away quickly.

“I’m fine.” She replied with an attitude. I sighed heavily and walked away as Blessing was calling me.

I could feel vomit rising up when I saw Amanda's face and I ran to the bathroom to throw up. Blessing followed me and I gave him a deadly look after rinsing my mouth.

"What the actual fuck Blessing? Why did you invite her?" he had this grin on his face and my reaction to seeing her face didn't seem to phase him at all.

"I have a plan. Trust me." I huffed audibly and followed him to the others. Most people that were here attended our school and that girl, the balcony girl, seemed to be the only face that I didn't know.

"Everyone follow me to the basement." Blessing announced and there was confused chatter in the room.

"Amanda, let's get in first." He said with a smile and held out his hand to her. She took it reluctantly and they led the way to the basement.

Blessing's POV

I held on tightly to her hand even though her sight disgusted me. I had been wrecking my brain for weeks now trying to find something to get back at her with and this seemed – in fact no – this was the perfect revenge plan and I knew Luxolo would refuse so I simply didn't tell him. I stood by the door before opening it and faced everyone with her still clinging on to my arm.

“Now, what you're about to experience will teach you to live with people. It will teach you that Karma is a bitch and it will teach you that in life there are boundaries. Invisible lines that you simply – don't – cross...” I looked at her as I said the last three words and she looked back at me with suspecting eyes.

“You don't fuck with the squad. You just don't.” I was still looking at her as I said this and her grip on my hand loosened a bit.

“Open the door already!” someone shouted and I laughed.

“Okay, okay.” I pushed the door open and we all stepped inside and walked down the stairs in sync. The lights were off and I whispered, “Karma is a bitch.” in her ear before switching on the lights.

Gasps echoed in the room followed by an eruption of laughter. She let go of my hand the minute those lights went on and looked at me with pain etched on her face.

A few days ago I dug up my old memory card and guess what I found? Nudes of Amanda back in the day when we used to date. Yes, we dated, but that’s a story for another day.

And me, having the twisted mind that I have decided to print them, enlarge them and paste them all over my basement. Literally, there were more than twenty pictures pasted on all the walls and people were already taking pictures of the pictures.

She began crying and ran out faster than I could say “I warned you.”

Chapter 22: Sick

Sick.

X's POV

Amanda pushed past me and almost fell in the process of running up the stairs. I was confused to the point where all I could do was stare at the pictures on the walls.

“Should I run after her?” I kept repeating in my head but my feet refused to move and were practically planted on that cold concrete basement floor. Blessing walked towards me with a proud smile on his face

and I shook my head to clear the hazy thoughts.

“This isn’t what I want to turn into... this isn’t me. This isn’t right.” I muttered and walked out.

I didn’t know if Amanda deserved what Blessing did to her. I mean, was kissing my girlfriend that bad? Fine, it drove me nuts for a while but no one deserves this. Not even someone that hurt you intentionally. I remembered the time when she said “I guess you never really know someone.” She was right.

I revved the car to life and drove out slowly as I had a lot on my mind. The humiliation that she must be going through gave me goose bumps. Is what she did so bad that she had her reputation ruined for

her whole high school career if not for life?
Was that really necessary? At that moment
I made a mental note to never – mess –
with – Blessing. Noted...

They dated? That was news to me. Why did
he not tell me about this stupid plan to
begin with? And why would Amanda send
Blessing nudes! The stupidity is heart
wrenching.

I parked the car in my mom's parking space
and I almost let out a tear. Almost... I let
out a breath before stepping out the car
and noticed a car behind me. It was blue
with tinted windows and I had noticed it
was following me but I didn't pay any mind
to it because I thought we just happened
to be going in the same direction but now,
this blue car with tinted windows wasn't

standing behind me by chance.

My heartbeat escalated and I looked back only to find it had disappeared... but... am I going crazy? Am I imagining that someone is following me? I took a long, soothing breath and made my way inside the house.

“Where were you?” my father asked as soon as I closed the front door.

“I was at Blessing’s house.” I replied honestly trying my best to avoid eye contact. “I’ll just go to my room.” I added on after an uncomfortable silence.

“No, come here.” He said calmly and my hands became clammy as I remembered that I had been drinking and smoking earlier on.

“Shit...” I hissed under my breath and walked towards him slowly. He sniffed the air and grabbed me by my arm to smell me

properly.

“Luxolo Xulu do not test me. Uyasela? You smoke?” he said with a rough hold on my arm and I tried to free it but he held on tighter. His voice was calm but fury was in his eyes... something I had never seen in his eyes and it terrified me.

I remained quiet and looked back at him.

“I swear to God if I wasn’t depending on these crutches to walk you would get the worst beating of your life.”

“God works in mysterious ways.” I said with a smirk and pulled my arm away bravely but my heart was beating violently against my chest. “I don’t have time for you... I’m going through a lot and I don’t need this.” I said with a sigh, taking advantage of the fact that he wouldn’t

follow me and walked up the stairs to my room locking it straight afterwards.

There was violent thumping, I faced the other way but the noise seemed to get louder and louder. One more bang and I sat up huffing in frustration and relief, I thought I was having a nightmare but someone was knocking on my bedroom door. I slipped off the bed and opened up in annoyance.

“What do you - ” I stopped mid-sentence when I saw Amanda standing there with tears streaming down her face and messy hair. Her make-up was smudged and she was breathing heavily.

I looked over to my alarm clock with half open eyes and the time was 2:15 in the morning. I grunted and looked back at her. “How would you be able to wake up every morning and see the one person you’ve ever loved, love someone else?” she asked with a shaky voice. “How would you be able to go to school and watch that one person that you’ve ever loved laugh with someone else? How would you be able to wake up every morning and walk around town and see the person that you loved, the only one that you’ve ever actually loved laugh with someone else? Please just – explain to me how you would do that because I’ve done it for five years.” I kept on an unreadable expression and looked back at the alarm clock. 2:17.

“Who let you in?” I asked with a yawn to emphasize just how disinterested I was in her life.

“You are so cruel!” she said as fresh tears invaded her now puffy face. “You’re so cold... this isn’t the guy that I fell in love with.” She said as she wiped them with her sleeve.

“This isn’t the guy that I fell in love with ever since we were fifteen! Do you even remember?” she asked as she looked so deep into my eyes I was afraid she would see the truth behind my poker face.

“You fell down the school stairs...” she began and I grunted at the thought. “I was at that hospital! Next to that hospital bed, Luxolo Monday to Monday! Putting my life on hold just so I could be there for you!

How did you not realise that that was
love? Did you not see how broken I was?

The fact that you were in pain

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pained me?”

she took a step back and took a breather
as her tears were now close to choking
her.

That feeling from earlier, of being stuck in
one place and not being able to move was
back again and this time I embraced it,
letting my emotions make a decision for me
so I simply looked at her breaking down in
front of my eyes.

“When Pam became your whole life...” I
cringed at the mention of her name and
looked the other way. “I became nothing.”
She continued after collecting herself.

“Not even the gum underneath your shoe. You literally just shut me out of your world. Did you never see the tears I shed whenever I passed you as you walked with Pam? Did you never hear me weeping at the back of the classroom while you were laughing with Blessing about something that you and Pam did that weekend? I remember telling myself that the last tear for you had dropped... that was when I planned to crush you but I didn’t mean to turn you into this. I just... I wanted your attention. I craved it, I wanted to smell it, touch it, kiss it and have it at the tip of my fingers all the time. I still do but... fate decided to be cruel.” I huffed at that statement.

“It isn’t fate... correct yourself.” I chirped

in and she huffed as well while wiping her tears.

“Fine... maybe it isn’t fate. Maybe it’s God punishing me for being a bitch. I needed your attention Luxolo! I was asking for it, silently pleading but that didn’t seem to work so I decided to scream in order for you to hear me. And the only way you’d actually hear me, in fact the only way you’d actually listen was if I screamed with Pam.”

She covered her face for a few seconds and looked at me with her red, pain stricken eyes.

“You’re sick.” I said through clenched teeth.

“Oh?” she said with a light chuckle. “I didn’t come here to justify my twisted actions but you... you aren’t sanctimonious either. You, Luxolo Xulu, are just as sick as I am. A

sick motherfucking bastard that I fell in love with... do you want to know what sick is?" she asked rhetorically and I stared at her blankly.

"Sick is using your mother's death as an excuse to break a girls virginity. Now that, that is all different kinds of sick..." she placed emphasis on the sick and my tummy churned.

Chapter 23: Superhero

Superhero

John's POV

“I love you...” I blurted out and she stopped laughing and looked at me. Her grip on my hand loosening and the smile fading away as the words sunk in. With just one – letter – each...

She looked away and closed her eyes slowly.

“Hey... hey...” I said with a concern lathered voice. “What’s wrong?”

Her silence was excruciatingly loud, the soft breeze of the wind the only thing one could hear then there were soft sobs coming from her. I pulled her onto my chest and she sobbed there for a

while until I made her look up at me and asked what was wrong again.

“Nothing... it’s all right. It’s just too right.” she said softly and looked up at me with those fragile eyes. It was all new to me. She’d always put on this strong front so seeing her break down by just three meaningful words made me feel protective and overwhelmed. I didn’t understand. I kept quiet, waiting for her to elaborate further.

“And I know.” She explained and touched my face ever so gently. “I’ve always known.” And there it was. The walls were up again, she confirmed this by kissing my cheek and giving me a bone crushing hug. Like she was trying to tell me something and she didn’t exactly know how to put it in words. Like a crying infant, they scream for attention without saying a word but as a parent you know exactly what they want... what they need. And you give it to them.

But this, now, it was much more complex. I knew that she was screaming but I didn’t understand, I didn’t know and I didn’t give. That was the worst mistake.

“Get out of my house. Just leave!” I sat up straight, fresh sweat crawling down my face and escalated breathing. I looked over at the watch and it was past two in the morning.

“Leave, Amanda!” Luxolo was shouting and I got up slowly, as perplexed as I was to see what was going on. This boy is going to send me to an early grave.

“Hey! What’s going on here!” I growled and they both looked at me with shocked expressions. “I asked a question! What is this? Amanda! Get down here, both of you!”

They sat down on different couches and the tension was intense... I observed both of them with an angry expression.

“Well?” I asked and X clicked his tongue before answering.

“Please ask her what the fuck she’s doing here at this time of night? Please just ask her how the fuck she got inside at this time of night!” he shouted, clearly fuming.

“Amanda, ufuna ntoni apha ngelixesa?” I shouted and she shook her head violently as if telling me to stop asking.

“Kham’buze tata. Kham’buze.” Luxolo pressed on and I was too shook up by the fact that he called me ‘tata’ to comment. That one word just allowed me to let my guard down and sigh in defeat.

“Amanda...” I said softly and she looked up painfully. “I’m going to ask you one more time. What are you doing here at this time of night?” This time I said every word carefully, emphasizing exactly what I was saying.

“I came to see Luxolo.” She said through sobs and I felt protective of her, she was crying, she was in my house at two in the morning. Something was obviously very wrong and I was going to find out. Just not now...

“Okay, okay Amanda mamela. Go to the guest room ulale phaya namhlanje. I’ll call your father and tell him you’re here and you’re safe just in case he’s worried.” She nodded quickly and practically ran up the stairs.

Luxolo’s jaw was tightened and his breathing had escalated.

“Just like that?” he asked as he stood up.

“It’s the right thing to do.” I explained simply and vaguely heard him say ‘bullshit’ as he walked up the stairs and locked the door to his room.

“I’m going to be okay. I’m going to be okay. I’m going to be okay.” I repeated this over and over again while rocking myself to sanity.

I remember running home as soon as the bell rang. I was in tears and determined to let my mom know what Xolani had done to me. I was already tired after about a minute of running but I was determined, I needed to get home to mom.

“Mama! Mama! Uphi!” I shouted as I ran through the door almost falling in the process.

“Luxolo! Yintoni?” she asked as she pulled my hand and made me stand in between her legs. She looked worried and pressed on to tell her what was wrong. So I babbled and mumbled out the story of how Xolani had taken my lunch and then he told everyone that I pee in my bed at night and then he pushed me off the swing. I’ll never forget the cackling of the other kids... they were amused by my misery.

I don’t know why I was so determined to tell my mom but I guess, in my head

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she was a superhero. She could make everything better within minutes and she was so strong and always so beautiful, so surely, she must be a superhero. Instead of doing something heroic she simply smiled and said, “Did Xolani share your lunch with you? After he took it from you?”

I looked at this superhero that was standing in front of me and wondered if she had heard me correctly.

“No! No, mama I mean – no! Xolani doesn’t share. He didn’t share anything. He never does.” With that very same smile she said, “Tomorrow, I’m making you a bigger meal and you’re going to share it with Xolani, okay?” I shook my head vigorously, I didn’t understand.

“Why!” I shouted.

“Luxolo,” she began, “When things don’t go your way or if someone has just kicked you down, don’t sit and sulk. Rather get up and make new friends. My love, it isn’t about how many times you’ve fallen, it’s about how many times you get back up. You won’t understand right now because you’re only seven years old, but always remember what I just said to you.”

With that same sincere smile she kissed my forehead gently before getting up and asking, “Are you hungry? Would you like some noodles? I made you some.” She held my hand to the kitchen and made me sit down. I was confused and numb throughout the whole experience. The way she just carried on, as if nothing happened.

I needed that smile right now, I needed her to get up and smile at me, ask me if I was hungry because she made me noodles, as if nothing had ever happened. I wish nothing had ever

happened. I wish I could eat the noodles she made for me because I was so hungry.

But I can't eat the noodles that my mom made me because my mom is dead and I'm not hungry. So all I can do is sit on this wooden floor and rock myself back to sanity.

"I'm going to be okay. I'm going to be okay. I'm going to be okay." I said, as I rocked myself to sanity.

Chapter 24: Home

Home.

I took the last puff from my cigarette and threw the stub on the floor then stepped on it. A newly found addiction... it's exciting. Even more so when you aren't supposed to be doing it and that makes the thrill even better. I popped the gum into my mouth and got up from the one place where I could honestly be myself. But the only thing wrong with that statement is that I don't even know who 'myself' is anymore. I. Am... lost. I need my mother.

I had left a trail of footprints so I didn't get lost in this forest I now called my own.

"Where are you?" I asked Blessing over the phone as I drove slowly on that lonely road.

“Huh? We’re uh... I’m busy right now. I’ll catch you later.” He said hurriedly and dropped the call. I looked at my screen in confusion for a while when I heard a loud ‘thump’.

Heart, brain, sense, stopped. My eyes popped out as soon as I realised what had just happened and I reversed then slowly stepped out the car.

A girl was lying there and she wasn’t moving.

“Shit.” I exclaimed through clenched teeth and looked around to see if anyone saw me when a blue car with tinted windows emerged.

“Shit!” I exclaimed, louder this time and I jumped into the car and drove away as fast as I could.

“Luxolo

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breath. Fuck you just ran over someone and drove away? Who are you?” I kept asking myself these questions until I was sure that the car wasn’t following me and pulled up at my house.

“I need to leave this place. I have to go!” I said in a panic as I ran up the stairs to my room. With shaking hands I opened the door and hurriedly began packing anything I could get my hands on.

“What are you doing! Where are you going?” my father growled as he dragged himself to where I was. I froze and looked at him with guilt engulfed eyes.

“Luxolo!” he shouted with the same tone he used when he entered.

“John I can’t stay here. I need to go! I need to leave this place.” I said with a shaky voice confusing him even further. He stepped further until he was directly in front of me.

“I am going to ask you one last time, what have you done?” I looked back at him and said nothing. Tears were freely falling down my face now and I didn’t attempt to wipe them off.

“Nothing.” I said sternly and picked up my bag before he could say anything else. He grabbed it from the other side causing me to jerk back because I was walking away already.

“You are going nowhere.” He said with such finality that I just sat down and bawled.

“You’ve been in that position since I left you this afternoon.” My father pointed out and I looked at him with cold eyes. Clearing his throat he closed the curtains and switched on the lights. My eyes were following him everywhere and my hands were shaking from anger and fear.

“Look,” he said as he sat down on the bed next to me, “I don’t know what happened this afternoon but it clearly rattled you up.” I shook my head in disbelief.

“You are the worst thing to ever roam this earth.” I spat with disgust. “I hate you, John. Why didn’t you let me go?” I asked in a calm tone even though I was boiling just under the surface.

“Luxolo...”

“No! No! John I’m tired, okay? I want to go home! I miss my mother! I don’t belong here! I want to go!” I screamed and threw the side lamp at the wall. “I hate this place! I. Want. To. Go.” I said every word with emphasis because he clearly wasn’t understanding me.

Chapter 25: The Blue Car with Tinted Windows

The Blue Car with Tinted Windows.

“I’m sorry this isn’t that tidiest place you’ve ever been in.” the man mumbled as he heaped up clothes and shoes that were in the middle of the room and offered me a place to sit. I thanked him and hesitantly sat down.

He disappeared into a small room and reappeared shortly. “Would you like anything to drink?” I shook my head lightly.

“The cups are clean.” He said in an embarrassed tone.

“Oh...” I breathed. “Water will be fine, thanks.” He nodded and disappeared again.

“Would you mind telling me why you did what you did back there?” he asked after placing two cups of water on the desk provided and taking one. I swallowed hard and took the other cup.

“I don’t see how that’s any of your business.” I said defensively and he chuckled, throwing me off.

“Do you have something against that boy?” he asked looking straight at me and not blinking.

“Like I said, it’s none of your business.” I repeated and he sighed then put the glass down. He was sitting opposite me on a dusty couch that creaked every time he moved. He moved his upper body forward then placed his elbows on his knees.

“If I tell you a secret, do you promise to keep it?” I looked at him with a confused expression. “If I do something for you, will you do something for me?” he asked in a mesmerising tone that all I could do at the moment was nod slowly.

“Good.” He replied and smiled coyly then leaned back.

“I need you to tell me why you did what you did back there.” He demanded and I took a gulp of the water.

X's POV

With shaking hands, I took out a cigarette and the lighter and smoked my fears away. I hated this feeling, this was an unwelcome nostalgic moment and I hated it with my all. I wanted to go back. I wanted to go home.

I got up from the floor and hauled out a pad and pan... filling the pages with pages and pages of

whatever I felt mattered to me. I wrote a letter to a person that I thought mattered and placed their name in bold letters on top then stuffed it in the drawer.

“Luxolo...” a voice said and I opened my eyes slowly. It was John and I wished I didn’t have to see him again.

“What?” I muttered, not moving from where I was sleeping

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which was on the floor. A cold, wooden floor.

“Get up, I got you something to eat.” I couldn’t bring myself to look at him, I felt like a victim again and I swallowed the lump that had so suddenly developed in my throat. He helped me up and we made our way

downstairs, silence engulfing us. We sat opposite each other and ate the pizza without exchanging words.

“I haven’t seen Grace in a while.” I pointed out.

“Where is she?”

“I fired her.” He replied casually and drank his juice.

I swallowed uncomfortably and looked down at my box.

“Are you going to lock me up again?” I asked softly. I didn’t have to look up to know that he had stopped breathing. After a minute of silence he finally replied.

“If I must.”

I nodded lightly and bit back tears. I hated this.

“Luxolo.” He said and I looked up at him. “What happened today? If you dare lie to me...” he warned.

“I hit someone, a girl, with my – the car.” I replied honestly and he banged table with his glass, causing me to inwardly shudder. He got up from his seat and disappeared to the lounge then came back after a

while.

“Did anyone see you? Where is she?” he asked, anger evidently visible in his voice.

“I left her there. And yes... yes someone did. A blue car with tinted windows.” I said honestly as I played with the pizza in front of me. I looked at him before continuing. “It’s been following me for a while.”

He froze and pulled me by the collar up to my room and locked me inside, again. I’d pay anything to know what he was thinking

Chapter 26: Identity

Identity.

At school, I was listening to music as usual while everyone was conversing amongst themselves and every time I looked up Blessing was staring at me. Literally staring at me and he wasn't even trying to hide it. I took out my earphones and looked at him.

“Take a picture, sunshine. It lasts longer.” He shook his head and left without saying a word.

The day was long and draining but I didn't want it to end. I wanted to stay at school the whole day, or go

anywhere else other than “home”.

Blessing was acting like a girl on her periods the whole day and I cared, I wondered but I didn't show it. I

was so done with forcing my friendship on people but then again, I needed him and he knew it. Or did he?

Right now I really needed his friendship, and his alone...

The final bell rang and I inwardly cringed. I got up slowly and walked to the car when I heard footsteps behind me. I ignored them and continued walking.

“Hey.” Blessing said in a cold tone. I sighed and turned back.

“Yes?”

“Who are you?” he asked in an interrogative manner.

I swallowed saliva that wasn't even there and looked around. Everyone was minding their own business but still... it felt like they were listening in.

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” He said and stepped closer. “You aren’t Luxolo Xulu... who the fuck are you?” I repeated, only louder this time and I stepped back. His presence intimidated me. Everything did.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I mumbled and turned back, the walk to the car was short and just as I was about to open the door he closed it from behind me and made e face him.

“Luxolo Xulu doesn’t exist. I searched up everywhere, I called hospitals, mortuaries, anything! But you – just – don’t exist.” He said through gritted teeth.

“Well maybe you didn’t search hard enough.” I defended and pushed him back. “You’re too close for comfort.”

“Listen, guy.” He began. “I don’t know who you are... I realised that I never did but was our friendship real? What we had as ‘friends’? Or was that fake too? Since you’re literally the fakest fucker I know.”

“Our friendship is the realest thing I’ve ever had.” I replied honestly. “And maybe I’m just an eight year old boy stuck in a strangers body.” I admitted and got into the car. Before closing the door I said, “In my room, top drawer on the left.” then drove off. I’ve never been so honest in my life before. Fuck

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Blessing. You’ll get me killed for this.

Alizwa’s POV

After hearing this man’s story I didn’t know how to feel... but I knew that I had to help him. Or at least

try.

“Do you understand where I’m coming from, Alizwa?”

he asked softly and I nodded tightly while holding back tears.

“I’m in. I want to help you.” I said and he smiled genuinely.

He got up from the couch and ordered me to follow him. A tiny part of me was afraid of him, but the rest of me trusted him. I really did and that terrified me since I don’t trust anyone.

He led me to a cramped room and I could not believe my eyes... Luxolo Xulu’s pictures were all over the room.

Pictures of him in the mall, at home, going to school, coming home from school, his ‘mother and father’, Luxolo’s whole life was in this one room. I stared at this one picture where he was staring at this girl, what’s her name? Pam... she was laughing at something and he was just admiring her. The way he looked at

her, I wished someone would look at me like that...
someday.

“Alizwa?” the man shouted as though he had been
calling me for a while.

“Yes? Yes, I’m here.” I said, embarrassed.

“Do you want it?” he asked as he looked at the
picture. “I’ve got plenty more.” He added on and I
nodded and removed it from the wall then neatly
placed it in my side bag.

“Come.” He ordered and I went to where he was
standing. He had a white cloth in his hand and he
poured a colourless liquid into it... it had a sweet smell.

“Do you understand why I’m going to do what I’m
about to do?”

“Yes.”

He nodded and told me to relax, told me to take
deep breaths and that he isn’t going to hurt me. I
closed my eyes and he came from behind me.

“What’s the name of this thing?” I asked him before he did what he had to do.

“Chloroform.” He answered.

“Chloroform...” I repeated and he nodded.

“Are you ready?” he asked in a shaky voice.

“Yes, yes I am.” I replied in a steady voice and said a short prayer. “Wait!” I shouted and he breathed out irritably. I could tell he was nervous.

“I don’t even know your name.”

“Just call me dad.” He replied simply and carried on.

He placed the cloth over my nose and mouth and I breathed in its sweet scent. I tried my best to resist as little as I could and luckily it only took a few seconds to kick in.

At first I felt numb, then my vision and hearing began to fail. Then... then I guess I became unconscious because I can’t remember a thing after that.

Chapter 27: The Forest

The Forest.

LOOKING BACK

“Huh?”

“Did you hear a word I just said?” she asked, looking a bit irritated.

“No, no I didn’t. But I’m going to avenge you and her.” She stopped and stared at me.

“Excuse me?”

“Yes, I’m going to destroy that... that...” I breathed in and closed my eyes before I hauled out the biggest, most offensive word that I knew.

“I’m going to avenge Luxolo Xulu for you. And for Pam.”

THE PRESENT

So yes, that is basically how I ended up following Mr-Cigarettes-and-Mint into the forest, pretending he hit me with his car.

Okay the plan was that he hit me with the car, take me to the hospital but I refuse and tell him to take me to his house, make him fall in love with me... somehow. I mean, I'm not too bad a looker, then break his heart like he did theirs. Very stupid idea but you know? I'm a teenager. But... fate wasn't on my side, or maybe it was.

Because I wouldn't have met Mr Mysterious who is possibly my biggest asset right now, and me his. I didn't plan to end up drugged and in a stranger's back seat, a stranger that makes me call him 'dad'. Weird

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right?

Luxolo's POV

I made my daily drive to the forest in hopes that that girl was still there. I know it's crazy but a guy can hope. I wished I could rewind my life back to the moment when it happened... the moment that I hit her and... and just left her there. This wasn't me. But then again, I don't even know who me is anymore.

The blue car... the blue car with tinted windows was standing there. Right there. The exact spot where I hit the girl, the same spot I left her there... to die? A man was standing there with the girl in his arms. She wasn't moving... hardly breathing and he looked distraught. He looked the same way I felt when I found out that my mother didn't make it. I stopped directly in front of them with a beating heart, a heart beating so hard I could hear the thumps through the revving of my engine. Through the man's loud wails... he stood right there. I had expected him to come attack me, kill me maybe but he stood right there. With a lifeless body in his arms and the murderer in front of him. I took a deep breath, one that held back tears that were at the surface and I slowly walked up to them.

I was scared. In all honesty I was terrified, with every step that I took closer to them my heartbeat got louder.

“Take me to your father.” Was the first and only thing he uttered the moment I was within hearing reach.

“My-”

“Just do it!” he shouted, shaking me to the very pit of my stomach. I looked at the – the girl... the girl, I know her. I know her. I involuntarily whispered earning a loud, painful scream from the man.

“Get in the car.” He ordered through tears.

I couldn't say anything, I felt... I was... I just...

“Now!” he screamed and I obliged.

“Why are you home so early?” John asked as soon as I walked through the door.

I said nothing, my tears were flowing freely down my face. I felt weak in every aspect there is, my knees were failing me and so were words. I opened my mouth to say something but a feeble whimper escaped, instead.

The man walked in shortly afterwards with a smile on his face. Like a smile of victory. I have never been so confused. I looked over at John and his eyes had protruded to the point where I wanted to offer him a jug just so they don't fall to the ground. He knew the man with the blue car and tinted windows. That look, that look was a look of fear... and familiarity.

Chapter 28: Picture on the Wall

Picture on the Wall.

I was speechless, weak and broken. Most of all I was confused... isn't this the same man that was wailing a few minutes ago? Ordering me to take him to my father then now he's just... chortling like a victorious. You could see the glimmer in his eyes and the fear in John's.

"John, lead us to the lounge, please." He asked politely but he just stood there, frozen at the spot that we had found him in.

"Fine, then. I'll find it myself." he said with a smile and walked past us. John shook his head rapidly as though he was trying to wake up from a bad nightmare, the nightmares I have every night, the nightmares that he created for me. All of a sudden I felt anger and disgust for the man standing before me and followed the man with the blue car and tinted windows into the lounge because I felt connected to him in some way, a weird way. Like I knew him from somewhere,

like he was someone I've been looking for my whole life and I'd finally found him.

As soon as I entered the lounge I stopped, I stopped because he was holding up a gun and he was pointing it at me.

"Oh... Siv – I mean Luxolo. Please take a seat." He said softly.

"This isn't meant for you. I promise you I'm not a bad person." He explained but I was too frightened to move or say anything.

"John is a dangerous man, not me, please. Sit down." He ordered again, with more authority this time and I obliged. I kneeled next to the couch that the girl was ... resting on. With shaking hands I reached out and touched her face, it was smooth and warm. Warm... if she's dead then there's no way she can still be warm. My heart leaped and I checked for her pulse... it was there. She was alive. I wasn't a murderer! I turned around to ask the man something but he answered as though he already knew what I was thinking.

"It's just... its chloroform. It'll wear off in a few minutes." He

said wearily. "She's not dead." I looked back at her and took her hand then squeezed it for dear life. I thought she was dead... I couldn't believe it but still I was confused. I dried my eyes and looked back... the man was holding John at gunpoint. He was in the same position that I was in when I walked into the room.

"What do you want?" John asked and the man chuckled.

"Oh I already have what I want. I just came to fetch the rest of what's mine." John looked at me then back at the man. "I can't believe you still remember me." He said as he tilted his head to the said

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ordering John to sit down and he obliged.

"Luxolo." John said in a tight voice and I looked at him. "Go upstairs. Take the girl with you."

"But I can't just lea-"

"Go!" he shouted, scaring me a bit and I picked her up with ease then placed her on my bed, gently, as if she was the most

fragile thing I've ever touched. I stared at her face, her perfectly sculptured jaw and memorised how often her chest rose up when she breathed. I admired her natural her and went up to touch it but stopped myself before I could. Instead I gained some stalked tendencies and just looked, admired.

"Staring is rude." I heard her say and was embarrassed because I had been caught. I cleared my throat and got up from my kneeling position.

"You're awake."

"You don't sound too happy." She said in a drowsy voice then tried sitting up.

"Let me help you."

"Don't touch me." She ordered, taking me aback a little.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you destroy everything you touch." She muttered with so much hatred I could see the daggers fall out her mouth.

"Okay for a person that doesn't know me you sound pretty mad." She ignored me and sat up straight, shaking her head

slightly.

“I need water.” She muttered then tried getting up.

“I suggest you don’t go down there right now.” She sighed then sat down again.

“Why?”

“I don’t think its safe to... well... uhm just trust me.” She rolled her eyes dramatically.

“Trusting you is not on my bucket list.”

“That man... what is he to you, anyway?” she opened her mouth to say something but closed it again.

“Well...” I urged on.

“He’s my dad.” She muttered, sounding rather unsure.

“You don’t sound too sure.” I pointed out and her phone rang before she could answer.

I had put her bag on the chair next to the door when I carried her up so naturally I had to pass it to her.

“It’s fine.” She said weakly.

“Could be important.” I took out her phone and a picture fell

out.

“No!” she shouted before I could pick it up then charged forward in an attempt to do it but I held her by the shoulder, stopping her from going forward.

“You’re sick, sweetheart. Go back to bed.” I said and handed her the phone. “And I’m inquisitive.” I picked up the picture then flipped it over.

I wish I hadn’t.

God knows I wish I hadn’t.

Alizwa’s POV

‘Why did I take that picture off the wall!’ I asked myself in frustration his whole appearance changed and that terrified me.

His hand slightly began to shake, his body tensed up and his eyes were now cold. I shook my head slightly, to shake off the

dizziness I had been feeling for a while. So that was the effect Pam had on him. A simple picture changed his whole mood.

“What the fuck is this?” he asked in a calm but stern voice.

“I-could you please... I can explain that, okay? I didn’t take that.” I babbled as I took a step back.

“Who has been taking pictu-” he stopped mid-sentence and looked at me as if something had just been revealed to him.

“Blue car with tinted windows. Of course.”

The door slammed before I could even get a word in.

Chapter 29: The Past

The Past

Luxolo's POV

Have you ever been confused to the point where you literally want to strangle someone and make them vomit the answers that you want? I flew down those stairs in search of one thing : answers and there was no way that man was leaving without giving them to me. I stopped walking the minute I heard their conversation.

“John, its tit for tat in this world, okay? You killed my wife...” he chuckled lightly. “So I killed yours.” I stepped into the room with an open mouth and a wounded soul.

“What?” I breathed.

The man turned back and faced me, his gun was still in his hand and it was now pointing at me.

“You weren't supposed to hear that but what's done is done.

Sit down.”

“No!” I shouted in frustration. “Are you a fucking lunatic! You can’t drop a bomb like that then expect me to listen to your insane orders.” He looked pained, like my words meant something to him and he was never ready to accept him.

“You really don’t remember me?” he asked softly.

“I wouldn’t want to! I don’t know you, okay!” I shouted.

“You’re a fucking stalker! What is this?” I asked, holding up the picture of Pam and I. He ignored me and closed his eyes for a second, when he opened them again he looked cruel, like he had just recomposed himself in a heartbeat.

“Well, allow me to reintroduce myself.” he looked at John who had his face buried in his hands, crying silently, then back at me. “Sivenathi Buthelezi. Father of Sivenathi Buthelezi Junior, also known as Luxolo Xulu.”

My life flashed before my eyes. People only use that expression when they were in a life or death situation and this, now, it felt like death. Or was it life... my life being given back to me.

All the memories that I had hidden, that I was forced to hide into the darkest and dustiest corners of my existence all resurfaced in just one blink.

I remembered, I was eight years old when my mother died. She had been hit by a speeding car as she was crossing the road and I was waiting for her on the other side with the biggest grin on my face because I had crossed the road without her.

I could vaguely remember her scream. It lasted for a second before deadly silence hovered over us. The place was empty, I don't understand why it had to be empty at that moment because no one else saw. Only I saw and they took me. They shut my mouth with their big hands and they took my mother's lifeless body and drove off with us to the beach. It was empty there as well... they, they threw her in. They threw her in the water to be hit by those cruel waves as they whispered cold death promises to her and I was forced to watch. They made me watch, I promise I could have saved her

if I could but they were holding me back! I wanted to scream but... but they had my mouth covered the whole time.

They warned me. Told me that if I ever told anyone about what I had just experienced then what I had just experienced would happen to me. I agreed, I was scared... that's why I hate the beach, that's why I despise it.

They took me back to the car, the car was reeking of my mother's blood and they forced me to get in. I did. I can still remember their conversation. They were talking about how they can't have kids and that maybe they could keep me. That I was a blessing in disguise and that they could teach me, that I would be one of them and that I wouldn't be in need of anything. I had looked down at my old torn jean and favourite blue shirt, mom had picked those out for me this morning.

They took me out of the car and carried me into the house, I didn't fight. I didn't have any more fight left in me and they seemed to know that. We walked into the big house with nice furniture, up the stairs and into a dark room. The room had

black curtains... they were probably dark people. I think they liked the dark because that's where they left me. They locked me in the dark room... and I had to conceal my emotions. Hide them deep down because they warned me, they said if I cried then I would end up like my mother. I wanted to scream, tell them that I have a father but where was he? I was scared and alone.

They locked me in the room for many days, only letting me out when I needed the bathroom and only opened the door when they gave me food. At least that was one good thing, they gave me nice food. I always looked forward to the food. They convinced me that they were good people, they bought me a teddy bear. I slept with it every night to get rid of the nightmares. My teddy always chased the demons away...

I was scared. They convinced me that they were good people
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told me that they liked me and they're going to keep me. They forced me to call them mom and dad. I did, I was scared. They

told me that my name was Luxolo, that my mom was now at peace and that I should remember that every time someone called me by the name. I accepted it. So I lived as Luxolo Xulu, I've been living as Luxolo Xulu since I was eight years old.

Junior, as my mom used to call me, was trapped inside the mind of Luxolo Xulu and he hated himself for never trying to break free.

I, Sivenathi Buthelezi, hate myself.

.

The flash was over and I was now lying on the couch with this man staring down at me. I sat up and bit back tears. I was tired of crying. I had been crying my whole life and he never heard me. He sure as hell wasn't going to hear me now.

"Thulisile's death wasn't an accident." He blurted. "It was planned. I was the driver of that truck. Yes, I killed her." He spat the words and looked over at John. "I wanted to kill both of you but... revenge is so much sweeter when the person you're doing it to gets to experience the pain. So fate was on

my side.” He looked back at me and his expression softened, like I was his dream, the one that you have a thousand times over and now, finally, you get to live it. The gun dropped to the floor and hit it the same time as his knees did. He looked at me, he looked into my soul and me into his.

“You were never there.” I said, coldly.

“I am now. And I want to take you home. Let’s go home.” He said with a shaky voice.

“I’ve always wanted to go home.” I confessed.

“Do you still want to?” I looked over at a distraught John before answering.

“Yes, dad. Take me home.”

We left. We left everything. We left Alizwa, we left John, we left the demons in the Xulu mansion and we left. We left with each other.

“Top drawer on the left... don’t forget. Please.” I whispered into the air. That was my goodbye.

Blessing's POV

'At 3am, I heard knocking on the door...

You know when you've been hurt too many times, you get to the point where you lose your emotions. You literally numb your feelings because you don't want to get hurt. But in the process of preventing your own hurt, you end up hurting people. You're so emotionless that you don't realise how much you're hurting everyone else.'

The letter began and I sunk down to the floor before reading the rest of it.

'Blessing I'm dangerous! I'm a danger to myself and society! I'm afraid of being alone because of what I might do but yet I deserve to be alone because of what I have done... in my

opinion being you was the best decision I ever made because what I am now is, yeah...

I'm sorry, Blessing. I'm sorry for abandoning you, abandoning you for people that influence me to drink and smoke. I'm sorry for not being there for you when you needed someone to talk to.'

"No, X. I'm the sorry one." I whispered to myself before continuing.

'I'm sorry for not hearing your loud screams through the silence. I'm sorry for not seeing the grey in your eyes even though at school they were glistening. I'm sorry for not sharing our jokes and hearing your laughter. I'm sorry for missing out on our favourite shows. I'm sorry for missing out on you teasing me about my lack of common sense.

'But most of all,

I'm sorry for changing.

I'm sorry for hurting you.

I'm sorry that I let you go.

One day we all realised that I had changed but we all said that I had changed to become you. You all tried to get me back to my old self because according to everyone else, being you was the worst decision I ever made. But while everyone else was trying to change me, I had changed into something completely different. I had become dangerous.'

.

I flipped the page over, looking for more. An explanation telling me who you are, explaining what you meant by "maybe I'm an eight year old boy stuck in a strangers body."

I needed to know but it was too late.

I was too late and at that moment it hit me... Luxolo Xulu is gone and so is the eight year old boy.

I never really knew him and now, now I never will.

He left us with a terrible, unanswerable question : Who is Luxolo Xulu?

.....**THE END**.....

